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ABSTRACT

The articles in this issue are mainly concerned with how to reach the poorest and most disadvantaged sections of the population and how best to help once contact has been made. "Nijera Kori in Retrospect: In Search of an Organization of the Rural Poor" (Mohiuddin Ahmad) provides extracts from an evaluation of this grassroots, village-based, nongovernmental organization working mainly with women in Bangladesh. "People's Action in Asia: Constraints, Possibilities, Breakthrough Points" (Kamla Bhasin and Baljit Malik) contains an analysis of nongovernmental organizations in Asia and discusses how some of those working towards people's participation in development are approaching the task. Some extracts from a lecture by Bakthan Tychicus on "education for liberation" provide the reader with his philosophy on how to help people understand their situation and from that understanding to look for ways to improve that situation. "Popular Theatre, Conscientization, and Popular Organization" (Ross Kidd) provides the background to what popular theater is and how it can help people transform structures keeping them exploited and dependent. "Third World Popular Theatre" (Michael Etherton) describes a play developed by and for landless laborers and discusses how popular theater can be used. "Continuing the Literacy Debate" (Heribert Hinzen) contains stories and outlines of reports taken from personal experience. (YLB)

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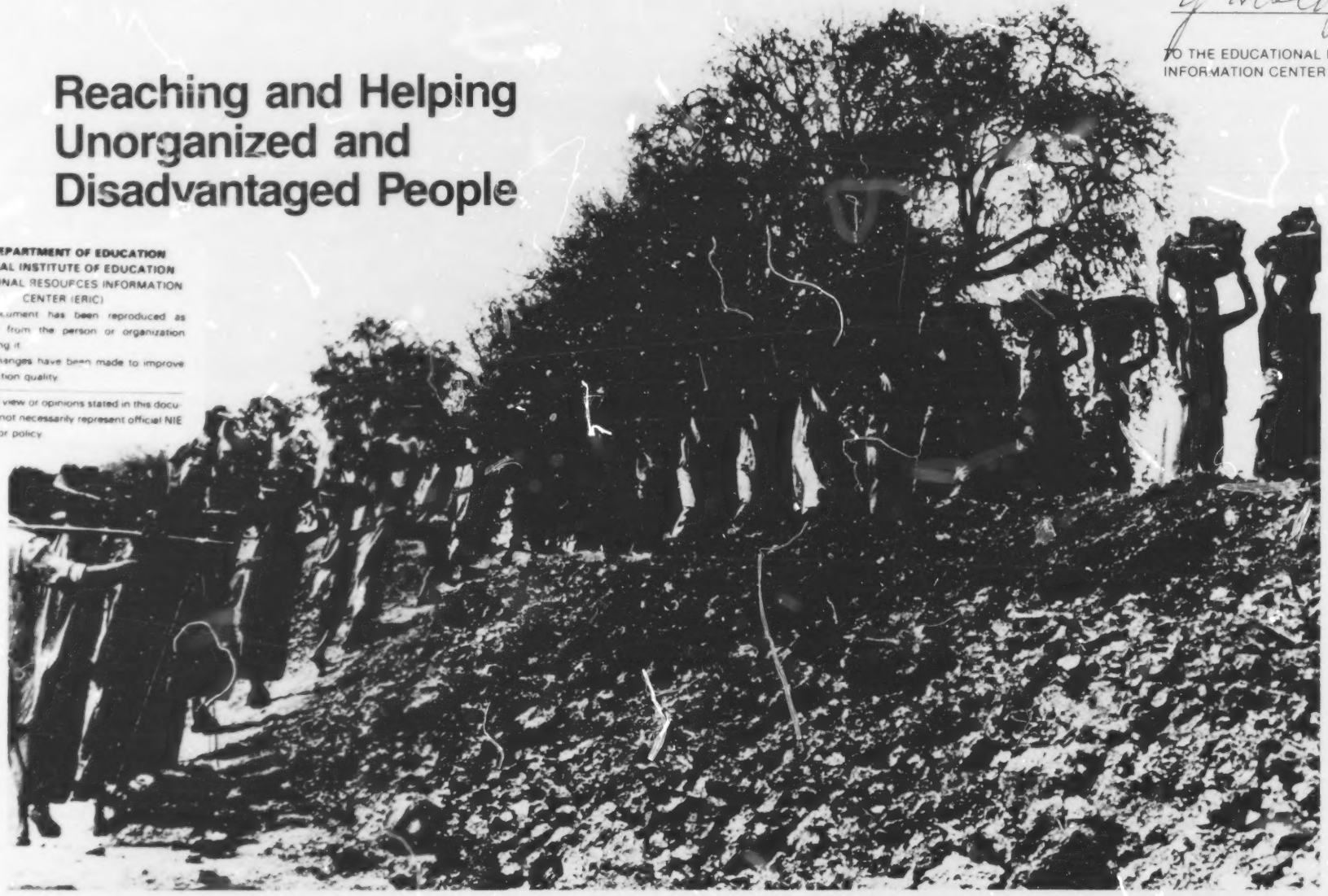

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INTRODUCTION

The articles in this issue of the Courier are mainly concerned with reaching the poorest and most disadvantages sections of the population and how best to help once contact has been made.

Nijera Kori is a non-governmental organization working mainly with women in Bangladesh. Mohiuddin Ahmad was responsible for writing up an evaluation of the work of Nijera Kori which critically examined the way it operates, how successful it has been and how it might be able to better achieve its aims. Extracts from the evaluation are included as they may be of interest to other organizations involved in similar work. Further information could be obtained from Nijera Kori, P.O. Box 5015, New Market, Dhaka 5, Bangladesh.

The second article is by Kamla Bhasin and Baljit Malik and contains an analysis of nongovernmental organisations in Asia and how some of those working towards people's participation in development are approaching the task.

Some extracts from a lecture by Bakthan Tychicus on "education for liberation" provide us with his philosophy of how to help people to understand their situation and from that understanding to look for ways to improve that situation.

One way of showing people what their situation is is through theatre - Ross Kidd's article provides the background to what popular theatre is and how it can help people to "transform the structures which are keeping them exploited and dependent". This article is followed by one by Michael Etherton which describes a play developed by and for landless labourers with a discussion on how popular theatre can be used.

The final article is a continuation of the Literacy Debate and is by Heribert Hinzen of the German Adult Education Association. He is currently working in Sierra Leone on behalf of DVV.

Cover Photo: FAO
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NIJERA KORI IN RETROSPECT

IN SEARCH OF AN ORGANIZATION OF THE RURAL POOR

Mohiuddin Ahmad

Extracts from an evaluation of the work of Nijera Kori, a grassroots village-based organization in Bangladesh.

For Nijera Kori the lessons gained out of its experiences at the field level, have been the most important factors for determining general guidelines and program strategies. Therefore, a continuous process of monitoring programs and assessing its performance has always taken place as an integral part of its activities. Despite this continual process of assessment, a need was long recognised for incorporating a more systematic method of assessing our performance in the field in order to have a general understanding of what has been achieved so far. It was also felt important to review the effectiveness and adequacy of the means adopted at present by Nijera Kori for successful implementation of its program, and also to identify problems and weaknesses that need to be overcome.

At a staff meeting of Nijera Kori in July, 1988, a decision to undertake an internal evaluation of its performance to date was taken. Accordingly an interim evaluation was carried out during August - September, 1988.

Eight members from Nijera Kori field personnel were chosen to carry out the evaluation consisting of four women and four men. They were sent to assess areas separate from their own working areas, in four teams of two members each. The designing, coordinating, analysing, writing and finalising the findings as a whole report was undertaken by Mr Mohiuddin Ahmad.

The findings of this evaluation could be of help and usefulness not only to us at Nijera Kori but also to all others engaged in similar fields of activities. We hope this will help present an honest picture of the effectiveness of our programs to all our friends and sympathisers who have shown keen interest in our work. The real usefulness of this report will be achieved only when it enhances the quality of our programs in the future....

Khushi Kabir
Projects Coordinator

The genesis of Nijera Kori's program may be narrated in a small phrase: Consciousness through action. The target audience is the rural poor, the landless and destitute men and women. Given the socio-politico-economic milieu, the effort of Nijera Kori has been an intervening factor which is expected to be followed by positive transformation of the general awareness of the target population. It had been expected that the latter would become critically conscious, get organised and eventually act to transform their conditions of existence in their favour.

Now the question arises how far this process worked. It is very difficult to identify the indicators of success with respect to a program that envisages a process of conscientisation. Nor any period of time can be specified for the successful completion of such a program.

The role of Nijera Kori had been primarily limited to the preparation of certain subjective conditions, i.e., organisation, mobilisation, cohesiveness, regimentation, developing analytical skills, etc., which were expected to be followed by concrete action. But action, in reality, takes place and attains success when the objective condition is also conducive to it simultanesously.

The general objective condition is, however, affected by a host of intervening factors and components of which the effort of Nijera Kori is one. Hence it may be misleading if any success or failure is attributed exclusively to any single factor. Also it is very difficult, rather impossible, to quantify the relative incidence of a particular factor in this regard. This poses a fundamental problem with respect to the evaluation of a program that deals with the development of a people's organisation in the broader socio-politico-economic perspective.

Given this limitation, an attempt has been made to evaluate the program of Nijera Kori, the primary objective being the review of present state of things in order to identify weaknesses inherent and problems faced in the process of implementation. Nature and composition of landless and women groups, nature and background of groups' leadership, groups' perceptions and opinions with respect to the program, management and administration of Nijera Kori, social implications of the organising process, etc., have been highlighted here as much as possible. This may not reveal the glimpses of a comprehensive evaluation, since many issues might have been either left out or discussed in brief. However, optimum conformity with fact has been attempted in the analysis.

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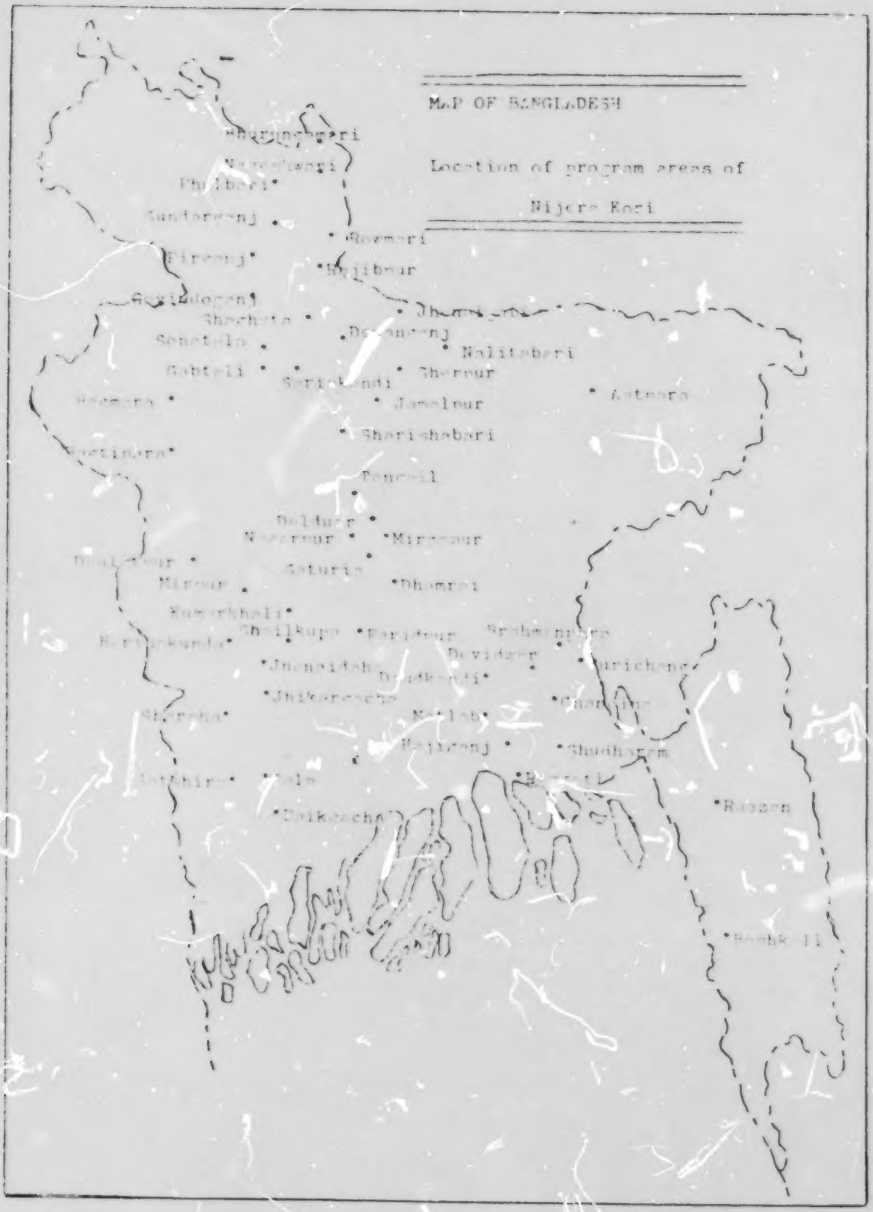
MAP OF BANGLADESH
Location of program areas of
Nijera Kori
Sundarganj
Firoznj
Gaibandha
Shahjahanpur
Sonatola
Gabtoli
Bogra
Sherpur
Jamalpur
Sherishabari
Kalihati
Mirzapur
Mirpur
Kawrakhali
Jhenaidah
Jhikargacha
Kushtia
Meherpur
Chuadanga
Shahrasti
Rajbari
Gopalganj
Barisal
Patuakhali
Barguna
Jhalakati
Pirojpur
Nalitabari
Jhenaigati
Netrokona
Durgapur
Dhamrai
Savar
Tongi
Narsingdi
Shibpur
Monohardi
Belabo
Palash
Shahbazpur
Habiganj
Sylhet
Chandpur
Laksham
Feni
Chakaria
Cox's Bazar

Background

Bangladesh is considered as one of the least developed countries in the world where four-fifths of the population live below the poverty line. It is primarily an agro-based country where more than 90% of the total population live in rural areas with agriculture being the predominent livelihood. Data reveals that around 10% of the people own around 50% of the total cultivable land, the proportion of landless being 40% of the rural dwellers and every year the percentage of landless households has been increasing at an alarming rate. These people live a dehumanised life deprived of real benefit of development efforts, struggling hard and yet unable to meet their barest necessities.

However, the position of women, particularly of the poorest stratum is even more depressed. Social constraints are forced on women which give them little or no mobility, leaving them unexposed to the world around them. Their employment opportunities are limited and those which are available are lev paid. They suffer from insecurity both at home and outside. They live as isolated individuals, forced to submit to the rules of society, making it impossible for them to take control of their own destiny. Development organisations in Bangladesh, particularly the NGOs, have been concentrating their efforts with respect to social and human development addressing mostly the poorest section of the population. Despite their efforts, the fact remains that very few are really committed to the problem of the poor and destitute women.

Emergence of Nijera Kori

Amidst a situation where no significant program existed exclusively for the poor and destitute women, Nijera Kori came into existence. The history of Nijera Kori is eventful. Initially the program started in an embryonic form to rehabilitate the famine-stricken destitute women who had been immigrating in flocks to the city during the end of 1974. Elijabet Helsing, a Norwegian lady working with the VFP in Khaka, started the program on her own at her residence, providing sericulture training to the destitute women imigrants. She also provided accommodation and food and helped them to earn a little by exploiting their skills. The serivulture program started in the beginning of 1976. Many women got employment in different organisations after receiving training from here. Elijabet had been financing the program from her own pocket, but with the expansion of activities and increasing cost the necessity for grants from different sources, particularly from abroad, had been felt and it had become imperative to have a formal organisational framework and relevant registration. Many social workers extended their warm cooperation and a governing body was formed in the beginning of 1977 comprising Bangladeshi citizens belongi to different spheres of social life with commitment to such type of

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social work. Elijabet become its patron. Nijera Kori was registered with the Department of Social Welfare in 1980.

Field Involvement

Nijera Kori became involved in field projects in August '79 when a group of women development workers joined it after deserting from CUSO's women's program. Gradually Nijera Kori grew into an organisation addressing specific programs and activities toward the rural women belonging to the poorest stratum, particularly the landless, with an objective to develop an organisation of the most oppressed section of the society. In line with this objective, Nijera Kori initiated its field program exclusively with the women in three locations: Raozan, Remgati and Kumar Khali in the districts of Chittagong, Noakhali and Kushtia respectively. Until mid-1980, Nijera Kori had been running its women's program where a large number of village-based women's groups were formed. The program was implemented exclusively by female organisers residing in respective field locations.

Shift of Emphasis

Nijera Kori emphasises the organisation of women as a separate field of activity. To reach the women, it is necessary for the program to develop in them an awareness of the social nature of the oppression they face. For women it involves a double lesson: an understanding of the oppression they face as a class and within the class and their oppression as a sex. Once such an understanding is reached, the identification of the social system with both forms of oppression becomes possible. But experience reveals that if such a program is to be implemented successfully, it needs to be correlated and integrated with development efforts and the mobilisation of the society in general. This led to rethinking of ideas.

Though the initial strategy of Nijera Kori had been to organise the women exclusively, it had been felt that it was no less important to include and conscientise the men belonging to the same stratum to work toward their ultimate liberation. The society and its inherent contradictions need to be judged from the social perspective and the problems of women are rested in the socio-politico-economic elements that exist in an exploitative social system. Having this realisation, Nijera Kori decided to add the organisation of men alongside that of women of the same socio-economic background. Though the organisation of men and women would develop separately, it would lead to a collective organisation of landless women and men in future when the situation would become conducive for such a merger. With this end in view, the analysis of the oppressive role of men with regard to women had become an integral part of the motivational program for men, with the eventual realisation that though they are oppressed as a class, they themselves are often guilty of oppressing others within their class, leading to

disunity among themselves. Accordingly, program areas have been chosen where there have been local initiatives to organise the landless and other poorer sections of the population. The implementation of this program got momentum when a large group of organisers joined Nijera Kori in August '80. Their previous involvements in different rural areas were also merged with the mainstream of Nijera Kori's program.

Program Summary

Nijera Kori's program is committed to the organisation of the oppressed people, men and women, living in the rural areas of Bangledesh, particularly directed to the landless and marginal farmers living on the sale of wage labour and other occupational groups, i.e., fishermen, weavers, artisans, etc. By living with the target audience, the organisers of Nijera Kori have been trying to develop the organisation of men and women at the grass-root level through analytical discussion and dialogue which is being systematised in an educative process which includes training, workshops, conventions and cultural forums.

Expansion is being done systematically in adjacent areas rather than in a scattered manner. Expansion is emphasised through existing groups. Linkage between groups and areas is maintained through regional meetings and group conventions on the one hand and through joint social actions on common issues on the other.

With regard to economic programs to be taken up by groups, priority is given to the mobilisation of their own resources and proper exploitation of public resources. This is treated as a means for strengthening organisation and collective effort rather than an end in itself.

Training programs in the form of a series of orientation sessions is the main thrust of Nijera Kori's activities for both male and female groups. The methodology is such that discussion forums are arranged comprising participants from male and female grass-root groups. A specific and predesigned training module is followed which provides participants with opportunities for critical analysis of their environment and helps them to build confidence in their own creativity and capability for action. What is most emphasised is a new way of looking at things, the ability to perceive, analyse and change one's environment.

Two types of training are being imparted at present. First, a basic orientation course of five days' duration is arranged for male and female participants separately. Secondly, an advance course of three days' duration is arranged having participants from male and female groups together.

There is also a cultural team comprising five members whose activities constitute an integral component of the training program. The team is involved in staging drama, puppet shows and a musical soiree for the target people. This team is mobile.

Goal

Attempts had long been made from different quarters to organise the rural poor. There had been many sporadic as well as continuous peasant movements against tenancy conditions, social injustice and political oppression in different rural areas of Bangladesh which were never sustained for long. On the contrary, peasantry because divided, confused and often misled by contrasting political opinions preached by different quarters. As a result, no indigenous platform of action of the landless and poor peasantry could develop on a nation-wide scale.

Since the liberation of Bangladesh, a host of voluntary development organisations have been working in different rural areas of Bangladesh with an objective to organise the rural poor, the landless in particular. But the situation did not improve to the expected extent. There has been unhealthy competition among some organisations. Many grass-root landless organisations are portrayed as organisations of the sponsoring agency and are compelled to implement pre-designed programs.

Nijera Kori, for last few years, has been feeling a necessity of a nation-wide mass organisation of the landless, poor peasantry and other poor occupational sections of rural Bangladesh. Without trying to impose anything from above, it started working from the grass-root level and emphasised organisational expansion through existing groups. Already a number of conventions of grass-root groups have been held at regional level attended by hundreds of representatives from male and female groups. The process of expansion and linkage has got momentum and is speedily heading toward the formation of a macro-level organisation of the toiling mass.

Evaluation

There have been many achievements as well as problems confronted during this eventful period since the initiation of Nijera Kori. It may be mentioned here that Nijera Kori acts as a forum of a group of like-minded development workers which provides them an opportunity to learn so that they can equip themselves with necessary understanding, realisation and skill. There has been a continuous felt-need for the assessment of past activities to consolidate efforts and to reshape strategies and tactics to cope with future needs. With this aim in view, it has been planned to undertake an evaluation of Nijera Kori's program. It is hoped that this evaluation will explore and identify issues and problems confronted by the development workers and will facilitate conclusive realisation leading to concrete action.

Objective

Nijera Kori has been working with different sections of the rural poor mainly with an objective to develop a mass organisation of their own and accordingly different strategies and tactics have been adopted to attain the objective. This does not necessarily ensure that the participants at the grass-root level also have the similar objective while involving themselves in the process of organisation. They may have their own strategy, typically conditioned by problems of survival.

Though a sizable majority of group leaders have involved themselves in developing an organisation of their own, yet the sign of multiple objectives is evident from their responses. It seems that the participants of the grass-root organisation have their own short-run survival strategies which they like to undertake in a collective manner. Many of them nourish the spirit of a broad-based organisation as the ultimate goal, but also many fail to perceive things beyond a certain limit conditioned by basic human needs. People's perception is moulded largely by material conditions of existence. It seems to be utopian to induce the zeal of organisation among the starving people unless they are ensured of a square meal. It is equally utopian to talk about complete liberation from the clutches of exploitation if the people are stuck in mere economism. Hence, this poses a problem for the organisers how to combine short-run objectives with long-run goals and how to mobilise the participants toward the ultimate end by paying due attention to their day to day needs.

LEADERSHIP

Background

Although there may be collective leadership within grass-root groups, empirical observations reveal that the leadership is being personified in a single person in most of the cases who works as the chief functionary on behalf of his group. Here the chief functionaries of groups have been treated as group leaders.

Data on literacy among group leaders has been found very spectacular. Although 26.61% of male group leaders are illiterate, 29.61% of them had primary level of schooling from class I to V and 26.26% of them had schooling at the secondary level, i.e., class VI to class X. As much as 17.88% of them received education of S.S.C. level or above. The educational background which male group leaders possess seems to be superior to that of the national average in this regard. Whether groups' leadership is being monopolised by the educated members is, however, an empirical question. The situation is reversed for female groups and as many as 75% of them has been found illiterate even though the percentage is lower than the national rate in rural Bangladesh.

Young and middle-aged persons have been found to be the leaders of groups in most of the cases. This holds good both for male and female groups. The highest proportion of group leaders being 37.99 and 40.63 for male and female groups respectively in the former age group and 34.08 and 32.81 for male and female groups respectively in the latter case.

Many group leaders have been found to have previous organisational background. Some were associated with village co-operatives sponsored by IRDP before joining the present group. Some were also associated with different political parties. According to survey data, 32.40% of male group leaders and such background. The percentage is much lower for female group leaders of whom only 8.59% had such background.

Nature of Leadership

An investigation among old groups of three years of age and above reveals that almost all group leaders have been associated with their respective groups since their formation. Further analysis of data shows that 81.19% of male group leaders and 68.18% of female group leaders have been exercising leadership to respective groups from the very beginning.

Probably this characterises leadership stability with respect to time from one point of view. Probably this reflects the absence of dynamism with respect to transfer of leadership. This phenomenon may also indicate that the intensity of awareness and capability of group members lags far behind that of the leader. Given a situation where all members of a group are critically conscious and active participants in respective groups, such stability may facilitate better regimentation and consolidation. In a different situation where the most of the members are passive onlookers, this may lead to monopoly and abuse of leadership. Whatever the

situation may be, it is a question of profound interest whether a leader actually represents the collective will of the group and is accountable to the group.

Voluntarism

In the process of the mobilisation and organisation of the rural poor, the role of grass-root leadership is of utmost importance. These leaders are the persons who are to work with commitment and integration. They have to face inconveniences and opposition from situations which are seldom favourable. They become the victims of conspiratory design of the local vested interest on frequent occasions. Particularly, they have to sustain financial loss for their involvement with such types of organisation.

Survey data reveals that 17.32% and 13.28% of male and female group leaders respectively have to sustain economic loss more or less regularly for their involvement with respective groups. This may eventually work as a discouraging factor for them with respect to their involvement with such type of work or service they render. It has been found that only 6.15% and 7.81% of male and female group leaders respectively receive economic benefit from the fund of respective groups, though not regularly, for their service.

Voluntary spirit of group leaders has always been emphasised. But how far can this be sustained unless it is shared collectively? Empirical observations reveal that such voluntarism, often moulded by spirited romanticism in the initial stage, fails to sustain in the long run and it seems rather unrealistic to preach this sort of voluntarism to people with a crippled economic condition.

Amidst this situation, the question of financial support to group leaders arises as a logical corollary. Also it encompasses the inherent danger that may replace the genuine voluntary spirit by avarice. However, findings reveal that the highest proportion of group leaders, both male and female, are not willing to receive any financial support against their service.

With regard to the source of funds for releasing such financial support to group leaders for their service, the majority expressed their opinion to receive it from the sponsoring organisation, Nijera Kori. Among group leaders desiring financial support, 38.24% of male leaders and 21.62% of female leaders opted to receive it from their own organisational fund.

The issue of providing financial support to group leaders for their service needs to be resolved immediately, since it may work as a disincentive to them in their organisational work in the long run. If they are to receive such benefits, the question naturally arises who will provide necessary funds. It seems from project proposals and other reports that Nijera Kori has been least interested to portray the organisation of the poor and the landless by its own signboard. Rather it intends to see it as an independent platform of the target population where Nijera Kori seeks to limit its role with regard to that of an intervening factor. By providing direct financial support to target groups, there is every possibility that Nijera Kori may, ultimately, turn into a father figure contradicting its own thinking and action. As an alternative, raising

organisational funds at the local level may be emphasised. Meanwhile, mobilisation of organisational funds has also been going on. This needs to be steered to a greater extent.

Cooperation with other NGOs

Nijera Kori is aware of unhealthy competition between different NGOs in many areas with respect to their field programs and is least interested to involve itself where other NGOs have been working with more or less similar objectives. Nijera Kori, through dialogue and discussion, always try to avoid such duplication and extend support to other organisations as far as possible without involving itself physically in those project locations.

One spectacular example may be cited in this regard. Nijera Kori has been jointly working with Proshika in two field locations, one in Ramgati in the district of Noakhali and another in Raojan in the district of Chittagong where Nijera Kori and Proshika have been organising female and male groups respectively. Such cooperation has been arranged at field levels where the organisers of these two organisations work together in a harmonious manner. Besides, cooperation also exists with some NGOs, where they agree not to present themselves physically in each others' area. Names of Proshika and UTO may be particularly mentioned in this respect.

MOBILISATION AND CONFLICT

Nature of Conflict

With the development of the organisation of the landless and other poorest sections of the rural population, the crystalisation of a new social force, the rural proletariat, is gaining momentum. However, the organisation is being developed through conflict and confrontation every now and then. There are conflicts at the household level where resistance is put forward from within the family. This happens more frequently in the case of women participants. We have tried to resolve this by organising the male folk as well. But grass-root organisations of the landless face much more opposition and resistance from the vested interest, the propertied class. The landless group members are victims of conspiracy, harassment and physical assault by the vested interest on frequent occasions.

Resistance of the Vested Interest

The vested interest is always afraid of any emerging social force that challenges its centuries-old hegemony. They always conspire against landless groups, try to confuse them through malicious propaganda, harass them by lodging fictitious allegations with the police and often assault them physically through their henchmen. Many such incidents happened during past years where the vested interest left no stone unturned to disperse and terrorise the organised groups of the landless. Two such examples have been cited below.

"They (the organisers of Nijera Kori) have also organised the landless to raise their voice against corruption which is so rampant at all levels that three-quarters of the grain assigned for food-for-

work programs meant to benefit the poor is said to be swallowed by officials. A fight for an increase in the daily wages of the landless has been the other important plank of Nijera Kori's struggle. But it has to reckon with all-too-familiar nexus between the local police, officials and the landlord. Consequently, the local power structure is arranged against it.

"In order to break the activists, the police had tried to implicate them in a large number of criminal cases, from rape to murder, even before conducting an investigation despite their activities being legal and legitimate (Neerja Chowdhury: Nijera Kori and Pilipina, Voluntary Action, vol. 24, no. 9 AVARD, New Delhi, P. 352)".

"Eleven groups of the landless comprising about 130 members planted rubber and bananas on khas land in Bani Para area in East Raojan. The local UP Chairman and other self seekers tried to harass the local poor by filing cases against them to the police. The local people brought out a procession to protest against these false and malicious allegations. Then a group of policemen entered the villages and assaulted some women. One woman named Halime was stabbed in the incident. The villagers then went to the police station to lodge complaint. But the police authority refused to accept the complaint (The Daily Azadi, Chittagong, 18th August, 1981, translated)".

Mobilisation and Aftermath

The recent history of Nijera Kori has been marked by some striking achievements with respect to the regimented behaviour of organised male and female groups in different areas of Bangladesh. They have been holding protest meetings against social injustice and bringing out processions to voice their demands. Also there had been many incidents where police stations and government officials were gheraoed by organised groups. Such incidents often get coverage in the press. Two such examples have been cited below.

Gherao as an instrument of struggle had been proved successful in trade union movements in urban areas of Bangladesh, particularly during the years of turmoil in the late sixties. Recently this is being tested in rural areas successfully leading to positive results in favour of the demonstrators.

"We want food; we want cloth; we want jobs. Raising such slogans, about two thousand landless peasants and women of Saghate Thana gheraoed the office of the SDO in Gaibandha. They also submitted a memorandum to him and raised demands for the eradication of corrupt practices in the food-for-work program, to declare Saghata Thana as a distressed area and to bring down the prices of rice and flour (Banglar Banee, 19th March, 1982, translated)."

"The construction work of a road connecting Daulatpur and Shehala, a project of CARE, started in last month. One thousand five hundred maunds of wheat were allotted for this purpose. It had been decided to offer 1.25 maunds of wheat as the wage for 1000 cft. of earthwork. But the chairman of the project committee who is also a member of the local UP paid the wage at a rate of 1 maund of wheat for the same amount of earthwork.

"In this situation, the landless peasants and workers brought out a procession in 19th March and held a demonstration led by Mr. Abu Taleb, a local organiser of a voluntary organisation in front of the office of the CO. When the demonstration was over, Abu Taleb went to a tea stall. At that time he was attacked by the above-mentioned chairmen and his henchmen. Abu Taleb was seriously injured and later on hospitalised. A complaint was lodged in the local police station in this regard.

"To protest against this incident, the agitating landless peasants and workers gheraoed the offices of the CO and OC. The demonstrators dispersed after having commitments on immediate necessary actions from both the officials.

"Then a team of representatives of landless peasants and workers met the DC of Kushtia and asked for immediate action in this regard. Directed by the DC, the SDO visited the place in 21st March where the incident took place and listened to the local landless workers. He assured them of a new project committee in replacement of the old one.

"On the other hand, the police recovered 226 maunds of wheat from the house of the above mentioned chairman, which was misappropriated by him. The person was found absconding. One of his associates was taken to the custody by the police."

(Banglar Banee, 23rd March, 1982, translated).

NIJERA KORI AND GRASS-ROOT GROUPS

Field Operation

Nijera Kori works with grass-root groups of male and female population belonging to the poorest sections through its field-based organisers of which the proportion of male and female organisers is more or less equal. A project office is maintained only in three field locations where the work is mainly concentrated among women. These offices are used as training centres as well as provide accomodation to women organisers. Besides, there are a few small centres used for training at the local level. Some trainers are also provided with accomodation in these centres. There is a regional training centre in Nungola, about six kilometers away from the district headquarter of Bogra. All male organisers and quite a sizable number of female organisers work in their respective field locations and manage their accomodation on their own. They often live in the houses of group members or sympathisers and work among the poor people of the surrounding villages.

Interaction with Groups

Since the organisers stay at door steps of the grass-root groups, it facilitates regular and intensive interaction between them. The organiser visits each group at regular intervals to provide necessary follow-up.

Groups also want regular interaction with the organisers of Nijera Kori.

Perception about Organisers

Given the socio-economic background of landless and women's groups, the organisers seem to be alien to them. Hence the success of a development organisation like Nijera Kori largely depends on how its organisers are accepted among the target population and also how they try to win their confidence. Findings in this regard are satisfactory, with 88.28% of female group leaders and 77.09% of male group leaders have been found quite satisfied with their respective organisers.

Recruitment of Organisers

Among field-based organisers of Nijera Kori, many have been working in areas where they come from. Also many have been working in different areas other then their own areas. However, the highest proportion of group leaders expressed that the organisers need to be recruited from areas where they work.

NIJERA KORI

Organisational Structure

The field operation of Nijera Kori is undertaken at three different spheres. Thana is the primary level operational unit. A coordination committee comprising representatives of the field-based organisers is responsible for policy decision and field operation in each Thana. The entire field involvement in Bangladesh is divided into four geographical regions. There is a coordination committee in each region having representations from Thana committees. The overall coordination rests on the central executive committee having similar representation from regional committees. In committees at each level, specific responsibility of management, field organisation and training lies with persons chosen democratically.

Internal Democracy

Nijera Kori always emphasises democratic procedure with respect to policy decisions. There is no administrative hierarchy in the organisation. All recruitment, transfers and policy decisions are taken at committee meetings at respective levels. Yet there are contraditions among the organisers, i.e., staff members, which are frequently exposed in different committee meetings and conferences.

For example, one has proposed an idea but failed to convince others present at the meeting. When a decision has been taken against his will, he feels alienated and it seems that the decision has been imposed on him. This reveals one of the major weaknesses of the traditional democracy where everyone has similar rights to express one's opinion but due to the lack of intellectual capability, one cannot establish one's opinion in the forum.

Universal democracy that gives value to each participating individual, thus, fails to work as a sound system of action where there are sharp intellectual differences among the participants. Those who can understand the concept better, can grasp the situation concretely and can suggest policy measures conclusively are able to establish their authority in a forum. Others, in such a situation, participate merely as passive observers. Further continuation of this phenomenon may hamper the consolidation and regimentation of the organisation.

Unity of Thought

Any concerted and regimented action necessitates optimum unity of thinking among the participants. This is, undoubtedly, the basic requirement of an organisation like Nijera Kori. Unless all participants are equally aware of the objective, work plan and policy consequence, it cannot continue as a viable forum. How far the organisers of Nijera Kori fulfil this condition is, however, an empirical question.

CONCLUSION

With respect to the development of an organisation of the rural poor, certain issues and problems need to be resolved prior to embarking on a visible strategy. Findings illuminated in preceding sections have revealed some positive features as well as some negative points. The positive aspects are to be consolidated and sustained whereas the weaknesses and shortcomings need to be overcome.

The composition of landless and womens groups poses a fundamental problem to the organisers. The dilemma that arises is whether to emphasise numerical expansion or homogeneity while forming a group at the grass-root level. It may be impractical to suggest a generalised principle in this regard. The situation may differ from one area to another. Moreover this envisages the problem of handling issues of contradiction and correlation among different sections of the poorer community. The bulk of the rural poor are exploited in the existing social system, though by varying degrees. This poses a two-fold problem: the expansion of the organisation without alienating any section that may play a positive role as ally in the struggle of the oppressed and to remain vigilent against the emergence of a privileged stratum within the organisation with relatively better economic background.

It is evident that participants of grass-root groups have their own short run survival strategies in order to maintain and improve their livelihood alongside the spirit of developing a broad-based organisation upheld by Nijera Kori. These two aspects need to be correlated and integrated in the perspective of the existing situation so that one does not develop at the cost of the other.

Groups' leadership have been found somewhat static which implies that such leadership is being monopolised. If it happens so, then it may work as a barrier in the development of a regimented and action-oriented organisation which presupposes the conscious participation of all members. The organisers need to be alert in this respect so that there is a two-way interaction between the leader and other members and the leader is accountable to the members. To reach this, the members are to be more active and critically aware with respect to organisational activities.

It is expected that advanced members of grass-root groups particularly the leaders, will uphold a very high level of voluntary spirit in organisational activities. It is also expected that leaders and members of groups should manage their organisational problems, particularly financial matters involved in their work, by themselves rather than have them handed over to them by Nijera Kori. This management aspect needs to be more emphasised in the training program of Nijera Kori and accordingly a special training module needs to be developed.

Participation of females in the training program has been found to be lower than that of their male counterparts. For the even development of the organisation, the female participation should be to a higher extent.

Perceptions of group memebers with respect to the management and operational strategies of Nijera Kori are to be taken care of by the organisers while reorganising their mode of approach and work from time to time. Frequent interaction with groups, particularly with the females, has been found to be the felt-need of the groups.

Last but not the least important is that the organisers should devote themselves to attain a higher level of unity among themselves with respect to perception, realisation and conceptualisation. Such unity will eventually lead to further regimentation and only then the internal democracy will be meaningful.

PEOPLE'S ACTION IN ASIA: CONSTRAINTS, POSSIBILITIES, BREAKTHROUGH POINTS

Kamla Bhasin and Baljit Malik

The following comments are extracted from the paper prepared by Kamla Bhasin and Baljit Malik for an ACFOD Workshop in December 1977.

Instead of asking just one person to write on this broad subject, we sent out a questionnaire to over 60 friends in Asian countries to seek their opinions and to get information from them about NGO (Non-government Organisations) activities in their countries. We received 12 answers in all from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Thailand. This paper, however, does not deal with people's action in the socialist countries of Asia. Most of what follows has been written either on the basis of these answers or has been prompted by what was missing in them. It should of course be kept in mind that just 12 responses covering 7 countries is not an adequate basis for analysing the role of NGOs or estimating the potential of people's action in Asia. What is stated here is being presented merely as a basis for discussion and not as a comprehensive analysis of the subject on hand.

The answers to the questionnaire show that there are many perceptions prevalent in Asia regarding the nature and scope of NGO activities. this multiplicity of perceptions has raised certain basic questions which makes it necessary to further discuss and analyse the very relevance of the term 'Non-government Organisation'; the relations of NGOs amongst themselves and with their respective donor organisations, funding policies of NGOs besides other matters related to the possibilities of people's action in the field of development.

NGOs - WHAT ARE THEY?

There is a confusing variety of NGOs involved in what may broadly be called development activities. Among many of the NGOs there may be little more in common than the fact that legally or technically they may not strictly be official government organisations. Religious groups. universities, student organisations, Rotary, Lions and Toastmasters Clubs, village scouts, cooperatives charitable ventures by private business, trade unions, political parties of all shades, village groups and caste and community associations - all these and others may be said to constitute the NGO sector.

NGOs differ in their motivation (religious - secular), origin (foreign indigenous), area of operation (rural/urban, international/national/local), field of action (economic projects, charity, fund-raising, pressure groups, conscientization, politicization, research. There might be some NGOs whose real motivation is something entirely

different than the proclaimed one) their relationship with the Government and the power elite (those who support the people in power and those who oppose them) etc. There are also vast differences in their ideological orientations. In terms of their understanding of social problems and the nature of their work, Professor A.R. Desai categorises them as philanthropic, reformist and revolutionary groups.

The Philanthropic Group

"The Philanthropic group does not view the problem of the material and cultural poverty of the rural people in the context of the institutions and the basic structure of the rural society. It holds the conviction that it is possible to ameliorate the position of the rural people through direct humanitarian effort, without changing those institutions and structure. It evolves economic, educational and other programmes of village uplift which embody such items as creation of charity funds to help the village needy, moral appeals to landlords and such other groups to relax their pressure on peasants, establishment of hospitals and schools and others.

The basic feature of the standpoint and the programmatic approach of this group is the problem lies in the fact that it attempts to improve the conditions of the rural population within the matrix of the existing institutions and structure of the rural society, by means of purely humanitarian endeavours....."

The Reformist Group

"The Reformist group subscribes to the view that it is the mal-functioning of the existing rural social system and its institutions (and not the social system and its institutions in their basic essence), which is the social-genetic cause of the economic misery and social and cultural backwardness of the rural people. They, therefore, work for a healthy functioning of the social system and its institutions, or, at most, for reforming them. They assert that once this institutional reform is accomplished, it will result in the all-sided betterment of the life of the rural population.

The distinguishing characteristic of the standpoint and the programmatic approach of this group to the problem lies in the fact that for elevating the conditions of the rural people, at present, it does not regard it necessary to replace the existing social system and its institutions by new ones but strives only to reform them.

The Revolutionary Group

"Finally, there is a third group whose standpoint and programmatic approach to the problem are based on a revolutionary conception. They think that the abysmal poverty, crass ignorance, and cultural backwardness of the mass of the rural people are fundamentally due to the existing social system and the institutions which are its organs to sustain that system. The social system and its institutions, they feel, cannot but breed these evils. They declare, therefore, that both the programme of individual aid and relief and that

of institutional reform can appreciably liberate the rural people from want, disease, illiteracy, and lack of culture. They argue that new wine cannot be filled into the old bottles.

Thus, according to this group, the evils of the rural society are not the result of any malfunctioning of the rural social system or its institutions but are inherent in this system and institutions themselves, are the inevitable product of the natural functioning of the present social order. This group, therefore, evolves and attempts to carry out a programme of a revolutionary transformation of the rural social structure from its economic base upward.

While laying decisive emphasis on its social revolutionary objective, this group includes in its programmes a number of items of the first two programmes. It, however, links its struggle to implement those items with the struggle for the change of the entire social system."

Need for a Redefinition of the Term NGO

There are thus those NGOs who have a stake in maintaining the status-quo and only initiating partial social change and other NGOs who want to forge a more wide-ranging partnership with people's organisations on class lines for waging class struggles with the aim of capturing state power.

Some NGOs are government-initiated and government-sponsored. These are defacto government organisations with only limited access to the poorest segments of the urban and rural populations. An example of such NGOs are the cooperatives in various countries. Then there are the NGOs founded by private individuals, religious trusts and church bodies which have been more or less coopted by governments and have become mouth pieces of the ruling classes. There are various examples of trade unions, farmers organisations and service institutions of this genre.

There are also those NGOs who are conscious of their autonomy, and are sometimes even critical of government policies, but who are not a real threat to the establishment for they lack a struggle-oriented ideology and do not have the required militancy to effectively oppose the ruling classes. When the crunch comes, these NGOs usually turn out to be more interested in their own safety and perpetuation than in struggling for a new social order.

Finally, there are those NGOs who dare to speak out their minds on issues where they disagree with governments and who try to mobilise people to record their protest and to block or oppose the anti-people policies of governments.

It should be clear from the analysis presented above that in terms of any meaningful action for development it is too simplistic and meaningless to categorise development institutions and people's organisations as being governmental or non-governmental. Institutions may be formally labelled as being official or non-official, governmental or non-governmental but often they may both share a common class-orientation. Thus there may not be much qualitative difference between a voluntary and official development agency. Both may be involved in similar tasks but may have dissimilar ways

of performing them. Both may overtly be a-political in outlook and may be directing their efforts towards the development of people as a whole. Yet both agencies could be performing a camouflaged political role for the benefit of particular social groupings. Thus it seems NGOs cannot ipso-facto be considered to be more 'people' oriented than government organisations.

'People's Organisations'

Another term which is now beginning to be used instead of NGOs is 'people's organisations'. This term is in equal danger of becoming meaningless unless it is further defined and clarified according to certain objective social realities.

Who are people? Any group in society is people or is it the poor peasantry and urban poor? If by people is meant any group irrespective of its class, then is a Lion's Club as much a people's organisation as a peasant organisation may claim to be?

Indigenous groups: The Forgotten NGOs

As one of the respondents points out below, there is an important category of people who perform important roles in the villages in a voluntary capacity, but because of their indigenous style of work they are not given due recognition.

"If one was to analyse an ordinary village in Sri Lanka one would realize that it is wrong to say that there are no organisations. First there is the family unit. Then there is the extended family. Then there are the group activities and social and religious gatherings. At the top there is the Temple. There is the village Priest, the Native Doctor and the village School Teacher and in some cases even the village Trader. This is closely netted with long traditions and the cultural pattern of the society. However, from the modern point of view, in this country, people do not recognize these people and groups as Non-Governmental Organization or a people's organization. If someone were to analyse the activities of this group, it is clear that they do more or less the same functions of a Non-Governmental Organization which has its Headquarters either in the capital city or in a city in Europe or America. They may not have a high sounding name for their organization. They may not call their activities "PROJECTS". They are not scientifically organized. They do not hold Seminars or Evaluation Meetings. Their transactions may be only through the word of mouth. They do not possess typewriters or cyclostyling machines. They have no ways of doing propaganda but they attend to some of the very important aspects of social service in the village.

There are other organizations which are more organized, e.g. the District organization of the Monks, but still they are not considered a social service group or a Non-Governmental Organization and very often their motives are misunderstood, thinking that they are only concerned with religious activities."

Should NGO's work Exclusively with and for the Disadvantaged Sections?

One of the respondents who feels NGO action should be only to support the poorer segments of the society, writes:-

"In my opinion the main role of non-governmental organisations in the field of rural development in countries like ours should be to help small farmers, tenants and landless labourers (who are the disadvantaged people) for the purpose of production and increasing their income and quality of life. This means a basic change in our concept of 'people" and "people's organisations". In our rural areas it seems unrealistic to use the term "people" for whole villages or blocks of villages. That is why the word "people" has been misused and the beneficiaries have sometimes been those already in an advantageous and influential position. We should not delude ourselves that village committees or tola committtees and committees higher up set up by non-governmental bodies through an elective process can be the only valid and effective form of people's organisation.

The fact is that today in the rural areas due to changes in the technology of agriculture, competitive economic interests among segments of people have come to stay. This situation is different from that of exploiters and exploited. Some old-time exploiters in rural areas were also benign patriarchs. Today we have middle level entrepreneurs who are not interested in having small farmers, tenants and landless labourers as competitors.

The job of the non-governmental organisations should be to arrange the organisation of these disadvantaged people so that they can be strong enough to compete in this changed situation. The base of the bargaining power in the rural situation is economic strength acquired through team work, and demands formulated through participational grass-roots democracy rather than representational democracy only. Political power in the case of Maoists may come through the barrel of the gun. But in the case of small disadvantaged farmers, tenants and landless labourers in newly free countries of Asia it has better chances of coming through team-work production and direct participational bodies of the disadvantaged segments of the rural people. Nobody is doing this job at present. I venture to suggest that non-governmental bodies should apply themselves to this task instead of undertaking rural development on a whole-village basis."

The respondent however does not go on to analyse the political implications of such work. The rural elite will obviously not just sit back and let the organisation of the disadvantaged erode their power.

NGO Coordination

Hardly any country in Asia has federations of NGOs either at the

national or state (regional) level, which include at least the majority of NGOs. There are however federations in some countries of particular groups, like the National Federation of YMCA and YWCA, national Christian councils, Federation of Ram Krishna Missions. All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress, national federations of different Muslim groups in Indonesia and Malaysia, National Secretariat of Social Action in the Philippines etc. Some youth organisations, women's organisations, trade unions also have their national federations.

A friend from India writes - "There is not much hope of effective linkage and solidarity of non-governmental development organisations materialising in India unless concerned groups first have a common ideology. The organisations which are working in the field are so many and the objectives and motivations of the people working there are so different that it seems highly unlikely that all these groups will come together under one roof."

The NGO - Government Relationship

Asian governments appear to have much in common in the attitudes they have towards NGOs in their countries. There are legal provisions in most countries for the creation of charitable trusts, foundations, unions and political parties (except communist parties in the South East Asian countries). The rules and regulations governing these NGOs are not always precise or well defined, but a check is kept on the funds these agencies receive, especially from outside sources.

Some Asian governments emphasize the role of NGOs in the development of their countries and also try to involve them in developmental activities. But the NGOs are expected to play this role according to the rules of the game as defined by the authorities. Most respondents have written that so long as it is actually welcomed and even given official support. In some countries governments provide NGOs with funds for their own administration as well as for implementing specific projects on their (the government's) behalf. There have been various instances, for example in India, when the the government has entrusted the implementation of new experimental schemes to the NGO sector. This was done in the case of the farmers functional literacy programmes, promotion of household industries for women, improvement of science teaching in the rural areas, leadership training programmes and other such schemes.

However according to one respondent the government has proclaimed though not implemented active policies in support of NGOs. "To have NGOs share in the task of development, governments must share the power of decision-making also. Willingness to share power has not been there on the part of the governments."

Problems Faced by the NGOs

Answering a question regarding the problems NGOs face, the respondents mentioned a number of problems. These problems

could be grouped into three broad categories.

1. Lack of funds and qualified personnel - This problem is mentioned by almost all the respondents. Finances it is stated, are not available, especially for non-project activities like conscientisation work etc.

The point regarding the non-availability of funds needs to be further analysed, (on the basis of some facts and figures) for it is not seldom that one finds donor agencies desparately looking for fundable projects. Secondly, the Christian/Catholic Church-network is certainly not short of funds. It has been estimated that church funds as a whole equal the total resources of the entire development programme of all the U.N. agencies put together.

2. Problems vis-a-vis the governments can be the following -

2.1 Because of the all pervasiveness of governments the major initiative for development is seen to be in the hands of governments; hence the NGOs have very little 'elbow room'

2.2 Mass media is controlled by governments in some countries. Newspapers, magazines, newsletters and broadcasting stations, which voice dissent are banned and silenced, making communication difficult.

2.3 Workers and people belonging to NGOs critical of the power elite are always harrassed by government officials and agents. Workers can easily be charged and arrested for subversion and in some countries many workers are in prisons for working with the poor. Quite a number of foreign Christian/Catholic priests working with the poor have been deported without due process from some Asian Countries

2.4 Many genuine people's organisations have been banned.

Not all NGOs face this problem to the same extent. Those who want to retain their independence and their right to dissent from what they do not endorse face these problems much more than those who toe the official line or just concentrate on their little projects without taking any stand on any issues.

3. Problems vis-a-vis the People

According to one respondent one of the problems faced by the NGOs is the

"disbelief amongst the general public that a person or group could be doing work "disinterestedly". Where funds are obtained from abroad, the concerned organisation is even more suspect."

According to another respondent "the attitude of the poorest of the poor who are the peasants of this country towards the 'imported NGOs' also creates some hurdles." According to him "those who are actively involved in NGO activities are the urban elite who are western-educated and who have no experience in rural areas. Almost all these NGOs, with the exception of one or two, do not even conduct their meetings in the languages of the people of the country, leave aside follow the cultural practices of the people. Therefore these dedicated groups of people whose programmes are well meaning, are suspected by the poorest of the poor..."

One cannot blame the peasants for their suspicion of culturally alienated organisations. This is a problem on which NGOs need to do some serious introspection and self-analysis.

Another problem is that -

"The overwhelming wish of the general public is that organisations should dish out doles. For one who wishes to raise the level of public consciousness this can be a hurdle."

Weaknesses of NGOs

The following were the major weaknesses of NGOs identified by the respondents:

1. Professionalism, expertise and administrative ability of NGOs do not always match their good intentions and compassion. Often the projects are inefficiently run and finances are badly managed. There is lack of accountability. The outside donor agencies seem to reinforce these tendencies in their over enthusiasm to support grass-root work.

2. In terms of their contacts and understanding of the real problems, many NGOs have a superficial understanding and not enough contacts with the people in the villages.

Consequently many NGOs, like governments, also plan their programmes without involving the concerned persons in decision-making. One of the respondents writes -

"Finally - and perhaps this is the greatest weakness - far too many 'volagencies' work in the belief that they know best what is good for the development of the poor and needy. Usually only lip service is paid to the expression participation of the people in their own development. Socio-economic programmes and their implementation must emphasise the building up of a sense of community so as to make the community the dynamic force in solving its own problems. This condition seldom obtains. The dynamic force, for good or bad, is invariably the 'volagency' or project holder."

Another respondent feels that many NGOs also impose their own ideas on the people.

3. NGOs are often too dependent on foreign funding agencies. This makes them suspect in the eyes of people and if the NGOs get much funding too easily, they adopt an "expensive" s le of work which further alienates them from the local people.

4. Many NGOs fail to reflect the ideas and principles which they claim to be promoting in their own day to day work and human relationships. They tend to develop hierarchical structures with a few people on top taking all decisions. Some heads of NGOs, consciously or unconsciously, even start nurturing personality cults.

5. Some NGOs seem to be more concerned about boosting their own image than about working with the people. This is specially true of many Christian organisations.

6. Many NGOs spend most of their time and resources dealing with the symptoms rather than with the causes of poverty, under-development and oppression.

Lack of a scientific analysis of the problems and a clear strategy for development seems to be one of the major weaknesses of most NGO work.

The above weaknesses make it further difficult for NGOs to coordinate their activities with other NGOs. Personality cults, perpetuation of self-images, and religious propaganda are all hurdles in the way of a coordinated and concerted NGO effort to overcome social, economic and political injustice.

Is Financial Self-sufficiency Possible?

According to one respondent the NGOs can only achieve self-supporting status if they can convince their members of the necessity of their existence and also if they could find some way of linking themselves with the private business sector. But according to some others linking to the private business sector would be the very opposite of being self-supporting.

Another respondent writes -

"Though it is necessary for programmes to be self-supporting, experience shows that such an effort uses up some of the best available talent. Furthermore, there is a clash between resource-creating activity and consciousness-raising work. Perhaps it is better if only such persons take to awareness-raising work who have either private means or who have no problems in living from hand to mouth. It pays not to have children, better still not to get married."

The dilemma pointed out by this respondent is very real. Financial self-sufficiency through income-generating activities undertaken by the action group itself can be achieved only at a great cost of time and effort. The income-generating activities have to be run purely on business lines and they tend to become very time consuming, leaving very little time for the actual work for which the income is being raised.

The only way out of this dilemma seems to be a close cooperation and partnership based on a common understanding of issues between action groups and fund raising groups. This relationship should not be that of the donor-donee kind. It should be a partnership based on pure division of labour. Those who are capable of raising funds do that and those who have the capability to be on the action front get involved in community action. Fund raising and field action are two aspects of the same task and fund-raising is by no means the more important.

Most respondents seem to resent interference by 'donors' in the policy matters of 'donees'. They want only that help to which no strings and dependancies are attached.

Foreign Funding

Two respondents have no objections to receiving 'people - to - people' funds from abroad so long as there are no strings attached.

But there are others who suggest that NGOs should be very cautious while receiving funds from foreign sources because foreign funding makes NGOs more susceptible to criticism by local people and easy funds easily lead to an alienating style of work and living.

Another respondent feels that if our aim is to have a self-reliant development, making best use of locally available resources and material then we should not have to depend on foreign funds.

The general attitude towards foreign funds is thus one of caution, more so if the funds are from Christian sources.

SOME EXTRACTS FROM A SERIES OF LECTURES ON "INTRODUCTION TO 'EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION'"

Bakthan Tychicus

Education for liberation is not the subject for a picnic, as great risks are involved in the process of liberation.

Education is an act of knowing

What to know? How to know? Why to know?

The answers to these questions are the Liberating Education.

"Liberating education in which people deal with reality (a) critically and (b) creatively with reality, and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."

So, what to know? - The Reality

how to know? - Critical reflection creative action

why to know? - Transformation of their world

Liberation of the people has to be viewed in the context of the society in which they live. In other words - Their Reality. People only understand things in terms of their experience, which means that we must get within their experience.

Communication is a two-way process. If we try to get our ideas across to others without paying attention to what they have to say to us we forget about the whole thing. True dialogue can not exist unless it involves critical thinking which leads the people to creative action. Without dialogue there can be no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. People can do it, and therefore people can know. Knowledge is not a fact, but a social process to be created and re-created. The process of transformation also is an act of knowing. It is only because the people are capable of action that transforms reality, that they can know the reality. Whatever helps people to liberate themselves from the bonds that tie them comes under the programme of education for liberation.

Reality

To deal with reality, we should understand the reality. How? Accept the world as it is. Accept the structure as it is. Accept the people as they are, and not as they should be.

Liberating Education is for Change

Whatever we do in our community work, we are contributing something towards change. Let us analyse the scope and limitation of bringing change.

Change from what?

Change to what?

Change introduced by whom?

for whom?

Who initiates the change?

Is it desirable change for the community?

Who is involved in the process of change?

What are the effects and effectiveness of change?

Are the people free to bring in any change? - or expected to bring in change within a structure?

What are the means and ends?

Let us first examine ourselves. Am I changed? Am I radical enough to bring in change? ...

Education for liberation is a political act. The oppressor is possessive of power and authority. He is not for change desired by the oppressed. On the other hand the oppressed have to get power to transform, or modify, their society. It is impossible to analyse education for liberation without analysing the problem of power. The oppressed can only transform the society by their political action. So the liberating education is politicising the oppressed. They need power to create and recreate history. People are capable of actions that transform reality.

"Conflict is the essential core of a free and open society".

"Life is conflict and in conflict you are alive." (Saul Alinsky)

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation, stressed three issues in his liberating education.

1. Love
2. Freedom
3. Creation

To love means to be on the side of. To be on the side of a woman is to love her. To be on the side of the oppressed, or on the side of some friend, is to love them. To be on the side of, also means to share the miseries and joys of. By freedom Gandhi implied Liberation. By creation he drew attention to self-expression.

The education for liberation is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is an act of courage, not fear - love is commitment to other men. It must generate other acts of freedom, otherwise it is not love.

* * * * * * *

"Conscientization"

Philosophy: A person, or group of persons, involved in the process of conscientization should have indomintable faith in the people. People can do it, and therefore the people can know. It is only because they are capable of action that transforms reality, that they can know reality. It is through critical awareness of reality people develop the capacity to transform it. The oppressed become aware of the reality which is exploitation, and their ability to change the situation. Therefore, conscientization leads to action. Reality cannot be changed in our consciousness. It can be changed only historically through political action, revolutionary action.

> "Not all people have sufficient courage for this encounter - but when people avoid encounter, they become inflexible, and treat others as mere objects; instead of nurturing life they kill life; instead of searching for life they flee from it. And these are oppressor characteristics....." (Paulo Friere, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 100)

What is Conscientization" This comes from the word 'conscience'. When I sleep I am unconscious and I am not aware of what is happening, or the reality. "Conscientization" is a process in which people, not as recipients but as knowing subjects, achieve a keepening awareness of socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives, and of their capacity to transform that reality. It is a social process taking place among men as they unite in common reflection and action upon their world"....

I cannot know unless I feel. There is the sensibility of knowledge. We have to identify - personalise and get into the realities of the people with whom we are working.

Limit Situation: As the people are actively involved in the transformation of their world (the reality), at/a certain point, they find situations which limit them: "The Limit Situation". The oppressed feel that they cannot go beyond the imaginary line they drew as a limit, and beyond which it is impossible for them to go. But the limit situations are not the impossible boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where all possibilities begin; they are not the frontier which separates being from nothingness, but the frontier which separates being from being more.

This process of Education for Liberation is an instrument for critical discovery, that both oppressor and oppressed are manifestations of de-humanization. Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. The man who emerges is a new man.

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Process of Education for Liberation, with special reference to Community Organization

Community organization is a People's Organization. Change comes from power, and power comes from organization. In order to act, people must get together. It is based on Democracy - that is, of the people, for the people, and by the people. It is also based on PEOPLE's POWER. So it is a political act. People's organization believes that if people have the power to act, in the long run they will, most of the time, reach the right decisions. People's power is for change. The basic requirement for the understanding of politics of change is to recognise the world as it is.

As an organizer, I start from where the world is, as it is, not as I would like it to be. Start almost from scratch. To build a powerful organization takes time. It is tedious, but that is the way the game is played. In the concept of contradictions we see every problem or issue in its whole, inter-related sense. We then recognise that for every positive there is a negative; and for every effect there has to be a cause; and one always produced the other. The reality is dual.

Power is the reason for being of organizations. The word power means 'ability, whether physical, mental or moral, to act'. "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely".

Power is an essential life force always in operation, either changing the world or opposing change. Power, or organized energy, may be a man-killing explosive; or a life saving drug. The power of a gun may be used to enforce slavery or to achieve freedom. "Justice without power is impotent; power without justice is tyranny". To know power, and not fear, is essential to its constructive use and control. "In short, life without power is death; a world without power would be a ghostly waste land, a dead planet".

When people agree on certain religious ideas, and want the power to propagate their faith, they organize and call it a Church. When people agree on certain political ideas and want the power to put them into practice, they organize and call it a political party. Power and organization are one and the same. Power is the reason for being of organizations. Organizing the people for power is a political act.

Great dangers always accompany great opportunities. The possibility of destruction is always implicit in the act of creation. Thus, the greatest enemy of individual freedom is the individual himself. People cannot be free unless they are willing to sacrifice some of their interest, to guarantee the freedom of others.

The incoming organizer must establish his identity or, putting it another way, get his licence to operate. He must have a reason for being there - a reason acceptable to the people. "The organizer's job is to inseminate an invitation for himself - to agitate; introduce ideas; get people pregnant with hope

and desire for change, and to identify you as the person most qualified for this purpose"....

Demonstration: Exhibit the people's power to transform or modify their society. Demonstration could be a kind of dramatic presentation: Example:

> Madras city in South India has got a population of about 3.9 million people, one third of the population of the city living in slums. There are about 1202 slums in Madras city. People in slums are living in a de-humanising situation. They do not have the basic needs of food, clothing and shelters. After my training in community organisation in Chicago, U.S.A., in 1972 I first organised a slum called "Halls Garden". About 5,000 people were living in that slum, without proper street lights, drainage, road, drinking water facilities and toilets.
>
> I have organised the people over these issues and helped them to understand the united people's power to transform their reality. After many meetings and discussions, they prepared a memorandum to the Commission of Corporation of Madras. We worked out the strategy and had a role play. I acted as Commissioner of Corporation. Finally, about 2,000 people from Halls Garden Slum marched on to the corporation of Madras, with placards and posters.
>
> In the Corporation office, the Commissioner called me to his office and asked me what my people want? I replied to him "the people have come to see you, they want to talk to you". I requested him to come and meet the people outside. First, he refused; then I informed the people. People shouted that "if the Commissioner is not prepared to come out and meet us, tell him that we will go over to his room and talk to him".
>
> When I informed this statement of people to the Commissioner he got angry with me. However, finally he agreed and came to the lawn and met the people. People presented their memorandum, and demanded that he should visit the slum the next day with all his colleagues. The Commissioner agreed, and the next day morning he visited the slum with some of his colleagues. After looking at the condition of the slum he said that "The Halls Garden Slum will become a rose garden within ten days time". He issued orders for better tar roads, drinking water pipes and hand pumps, new street lights, and drainage facilities.

People transformed their reality with people's power. They gained self-pride and self-confidence to deal with other issues. Later, people learnt to organise themselves. I faded away from that situation slowly and moved on to other slums.

Keep the pressure on, with different tactics and action.

Action comes from keeping the heat on. No politician can sit on a hot issue if you make it hot enough.

A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag.

Man can sustain militant interest in any issue for only a limited time, after which it becomes a ritualistic commitment, like going to church on Sunday morning.

Justification: Doing a wrong thing in the right time for the right cause. Always remember that the guiding star is "The dignity of the individual".

"If you respect the dignity of the individual you are working with, then his desires not yours; his values, not yours; his ways of working and fighting not yours; his choice of leadership, not yours; his programmes, not yours."

Organisers are not only essential to start and build an organisation; they are also essential to keep it going, maintaining interest.

If we think of education as high powered motorcar. It is obvious that its use is dependent upon roads. Regardless of the quality of the car and our ability as a driver, the fact remains that unless we have roads on which to travel, we can only have limited use of the car. So it is with education.

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POPULAR THEATRE, CONSCIENTIZATION, AND POPULAR ORGANIZATION

Ross Kidd

There is a growing interest in theatre as a tool for development. This interest ranges from (a) those who see theatre as a more effective medium for putting across information and persuading people to change their practices and attitudes, to (b) those who view theatre as a participant-controlled conscientization and organization process through which the poor can transform the structures which are keeping them exploited and dependent. This paper will focus on the latter end of the continuum and attempt to summarize experience in this field and draw out a number of principles.

WHY THEATRE?

A wide range of reasons has been put forward for the use of theatre as a tool for development, including the following:

- as entertainment it can attract and hold the interest of large numbers of people, many of whom have been alienated by authoritarian methods and traditional approaches to non-formal education and development
- as an oral medium in local languages it can involve people who have been excluded from development activities because of their illiteracy or lack of understanding of national languages
- as a form of literacy which people already have access to, it gives people back their voice, a way of articulating their understanding of and feelings about the world
- as a relatively cheap medium requiring no expensive equipment and no maintenance capacity, it can be used on a mass basis by ordinary people
- as a locally produced medium it has the potential of being kept within the control of the popular classes and used for popular expression, grassroots or horizontal communication, and popular education
- as an indigenous or people's medium (i.e. a spontaneous form of expression used by the popular classes) it (a) makes use of people's own cultural resources and creativity (rather than reinforcing dependence on imported skills or technology); (b) helps to encourage participation; (c) revitalizes and validates people's own culture; (d) expresses popular knowledge and concerns - the starting point for conscientization
- as a means of self-expression it can help to encourage participation, the development of identity and self-confidence, and grassroots communication
- as a codification of reality, it can be used to raise issues and stimulate discussion
- as a "live" medium it has the potential for stimulating actor-audience interaction
- as a public or social activity it brings people together and creates the potential for collective thinking, decision-making, organizing, and action

- as a medium which puts information and analysis in a form linked to people's own everyday social experience, it is an effective way of communicating.

This catalogue of theoretical advantages of theatre, however, obscures the social content, the educational context, and the social purposes for which theatre is used. Simply because theatre is entertaining, culturally relevant, low-cost, locally produced, indigenous, based on people's creativity, live, participatory, issue-raising, and publicly performed does not guarantee that it will actually be used to serve popular interests. The way in which it is used will ultimately determine whether it reinforces or weakens the people's capacity to discuss, to analyse, to organize and to take action to transform their situation.

"People's own cultural resources" can be harnessed to express ideas which are against their interests. Unless the popular classes control the educational process (in which popular theatre is used) and have an input into its selection of content, they may be acting out the dramas and singing the songs but dancing to someone else's tune! People's theatre can be used to involve peasants and workers in their own domestication - a more effective means for mystifying their social reality and socializing them to accept a compliant, dependent, uncritical role in an inequitable social structure.

Theatre-based programs use techniques which facilitate active participation and use cultural symbols which foster greater comprehension, thereby creating the possibility for meaningful participation, communication, learning, decision-making, organizing, and action. But the techniques cannot be separpated from the content or purpose of the program, nor from the social and educational context in which theatre is used. It is the latter which determines whether the program is serving the interest of dominant groups or those of the oppressed. Theatre as pure technique is neutral - it can be used for domestication or for liberation. But once it is applied to a social or educational context, it is no longer neutral. It functions consciously or unconsciously as a means to persuade people to accept their situation or as a device for challenging them and helping them to organize in order to change it.

It is therefore important to look at theatre not as a "tool" or "medium" but as part of an educational and social process. One of the initial characteristics of popular theatre work is that the performance or drama-making activity is only one part of a broad-based process which also includes group-building, confidence-building, problem identification and analysis, strategizing and organizing for action. For purposes of this paper, then, "popular theatre" will be used to refer to this larger educational and organizing process.

WHAT POPULAR THEATRE IS NOT

Popular theatre is not the use of theatre for conventional development communication, as in

- the itinerant performances of folk troupes hired by the Indian Ministry of Information to propagate family planning, national integration, rural savings, and other messages
- the plays put on by the literacy organizers in Jamaica, Vietnam, or Algeria to help in recruiting literacy students
- the dramas performed by the Indonesian Information Department to exhort Javanese to resettle, or by FELDA in Malaysia to entertain and teach those who have resettled
- the performances sponsored by CONASUPO in Mexico and PAN in Columbia to promote consumption of their respective products.

In these examples theatre may be a rather unusual medium, but the communication structure is still top-down: centrally determined messages prepared by experts are disseminated through mobile performing troupes to largely passive audiences. The object is persuasion rather than critical understanding. The plays are "finished" pieces of theatre representing a finalized view of the issue rather than "unfinished" problem-posing dramas (which could be "completed" by the audience).

The performances are one-off communication events initiated from outside the community with no links to local processes of education and organizing. The audience has no involvement in choosing or shaping the message, in developing the creative event, and rarely in responding to the performance. Post-performance discussion, where it happens, is more a feedback technique to make sure people have understood the message than a means of stimulating critical assessment or the issues. Audience members are treated as isolated individuals and there is no attempt to use the collectivizing potential created by the performance to promote horizontal communication and collective action among them. The only "action" encouraged is individual adoption of the prescribed practices or behaviours.

This approach is what Freire has called "cultural invasion". The villagers are treated as depositories for propaganda from an alien cultural world, containing the things which the development agencies feel the villagers ought to know in order to become "modern". This approach assumes a modernization framework, i.e. transforming the traditional sector through introducing modernizing inputs. This provides the rationale for the "banking" approach. The poor are poor because they are "backward" or "traditional": the strategy then is to modify the behaviour of the poor, overcoming their "traditional ideas" and "bad habits" and replacing them with new ways of thinking and behaving. This is necessarily a one-way approach, because the poor have nothing to contribute to the interaction, being "ignorant" and "backward". Their role is simply to absorb the new information, attitudes, and habits.

The irony is that this type of theatre is publicized as a bottom-up alternative to the mass media and yet it is used just like the mass media, with centralized production of the messages and limited local participation and dialogue. The theatre forms do "humanize" technical messages by putting them in the context of everyday family and community life, but the imposition of centrally-determined information and the lack of engagement in critical analysis and collective action produce more passivity and dependence and a feeling of technical and cultural inferiority. Instead of stimulating their own initiative and self-confidence, they are made to feel dependent on information, techniques and advice from the outside. Even though theatre in this context is an unusual medium, its effect is one of social control and domestication.

As a tool for persuading people about development information it is largely ineffective. Putting across information cannot achieve social change when the structural and institutional context in which the receiver exists is opposed to his development. And, as Freire has shown, the "banking" concept of one-way communication is bankrupt.

THE ALTERNATIVE: CONSCIENTIZATION AND ORGANIZATION

The alternative is structural transformation - changing the structures which produce inequality and keep people subservient to the economic and political decisions made by dominant groups. The strategies for empowering the oppressed have not developed in a political vacuum: they have emerged as a response to the growing contradictions and crises in the Third World due to the penetration of national and multi-national capital - increasing poverty, inequality, growing landlessness and unemployment, mass migration to the towns, growing pressure to produce cash crops at the expense of food, exploitation of women, etc.

These contradictions and crises have given rise to their dialectical opposite: struggles by women, agricultural laborers, marginal farmers, urban squatters, marginalized tribal groups, and other exploited groups to defend themselves against the pressures of surplus appropriation and to fight for land, better working and living conditions, and structural changes.

A new form of education, communication, and cultural expression has emerged in support of the organizing, empowering, conscientizing, and structural transformation process. Its object is not to legitimize the existing social structures and exert social control but to encourage people to question and challenge the structures. Rather than anaesthetizing people, socializing them to accept a compliant role in the system, it draws out people's dissatisfaction with and provokes people to struggle against the exploitation and victimization they face. Rather than "banking" people with modernizing information and techniques and reinforcing dependence on the outside expert, it encourages the growth of people's own analysis, self-confidence, and fighting spirit. It recognizes that

"banking" the poor with modern information and ideas won't get at the fundamental structures which are keeping them powerless, oppressed, and dependent. This "development as modernization" process will only integrate them more successfully into the structures which are keeping them subservient - converting their anger into self-blame and redirecting their collective potential into the individualized ways of adjusting to the system.

Unlike conventional development communication which "blames the victims" for creating their own poverty, the popular educators and popular culture workers start with a structural view of poverty - that it is political economic structures, not people's habits and traditional attitudes, which keep poor people in debt, without land, lowly paid, etc. They recognize that popular education should lead to challenges against the oppressive structures and challenging oppression cannot be done in a passive way. The starting point then is developing active challenges to the structures and this must start with the oppressed re-evaluating their own understanding of reality - overcoming their fears, their view of oppressors as all-powerful, of themselves as passive objects of fate, and recognizing the possibility of structural change. This in turn represents a growth in confidence and self-esteem - a major step towards class consciousness. It also means taking action against victimization and exploitation in an organized way.

WHAT IS POPULAR THEATRE?

To begin with it is many things. It has no one single definition or uniform way of working. The experience is too varied. Instead of providing one definition, I'd like to give some examples of some of the different approaches -

from Asia:

- Action for Cultural and Political Change (India) and Proshika (Bangladesh) - organizations of community animateurs who use drama as part of the organizing process in building popular movements of landless labourers
- MSPCS and PETA (Philippines) who have trained hundreds of community theatre workers drawn from organizations of plantation workers, peasant farmers, fishermen, students, women, etc.

from Africa:

- Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre (Kenya) - a community organization which mobilized the whole community to produce and perform a play on the political economic situation of the peasants and wage labourers living in the area
- Laedza Batanani (Botswana) - an annual community education campaign organized by extension workers and village leaders, in which drama is used to focus discussion on community problems
- the Popular Drama Collective at Ahmadu Bello University (Nigeria) who organize workshops with groups of farmers in which the farmers analyze their problems and examine alternative solutions through a cyclical process of drama-making and discussion

- "Theatre for Development", a village-based workshop process for training popular theatre workers which has been used in Botswana, Nigeria, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe

from the Caribbean and Latin America:

- Sistren (Jamaica) - a full-time theatre group of working-class women who use theatre as a means of earning a living, a tool for self-conscientization, and a process for conscientizing and organizing other women
- Augusto Boal, a Brazilian colleague of Paulo Freire, who has elaborated a methodology for "theatre of the oppressed" based on experiments conducted in Peru in the early '70s as part of ALFIN's national literacy program
- Ayni Ruway - a Quechua Indian movement linking over 100 communities in the highlands of Bolivia which encourage peasant-produced theatre as a medium for solidarity-building and inter-community interaction as well as cultural revival and protest
- CECOP (Peru) - a popular communication centre in the largest barrio in Lima, whose popular theatre workshop is an ongoing community activity and the cultural reinforcement for the barrio community organization
- MECATE (Nicaragua) - a movement of community-based campesino theatre groups which play a major role in both community education and mobilizing support for national reconstruction.

There are differences - for example,

- the African work is largely university- or government-based, whereas the Asian or Latin American popular theatre work is run by non-government organizations or popular movements
- some are the initiative of theatre workers, others of popular educators or organizers
- some are short-term, one-off projects or experiments or workshops; others are more sustained, on-going efforts.

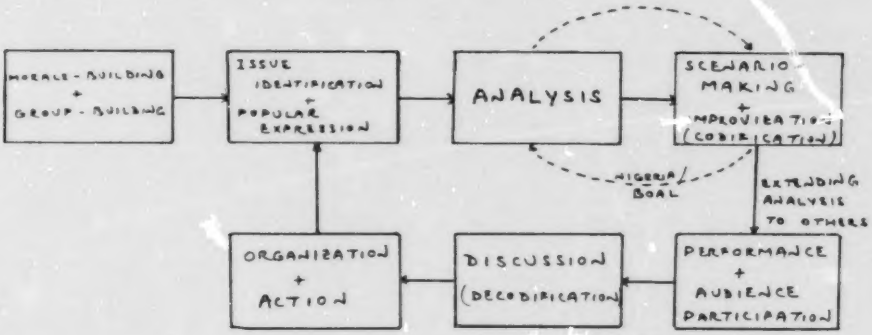
Nevertheless there are some common elements -

- the objectives: to increase the consciousness and assertiveness of the oppressed and animate the development of popular organizations controlled by the oppressed and used to serve their own interests; to challenge inequality, oppression, exploitation; to overcome not only the physical domination faced by the oppressed but also the ideological conditioning; to increase the power of the oppressed in relation to dominant classes, enabling them to have a greater say in decisions about and an increased share in the benefits of development
- popular theatre as an educational process rather than a finalized product: the performance is not the total experience; the performance aspect is linked with and reinforced by discussion and other forms of interaction.
- participation as goal and means: the process is aimed at increased participation or activism by the oppressed in asserting control over their lives; the means to achieve this is one which encourages them to take greater participation in and con-

trol over the learning process (rather than remaining the passive objects of an externally-controlled communication or learning exercise)

- popular theatre as a medium for popular expression - a people's tool to voice their concerns and articulate their feelings, perspectives, and analysis of the world
- a people's curriculum - reflecting popular issues, concerns and aspirations, rather than the externally-imposed textbooks of conventional education or the externally-prescribed messages of traditional development work
- popular theatre as a collective activity, stimulating interaction, the sharing of views, collaborative analysis, collective decision-making, the development of group or organizational unity, and collective action
- popular theatre as a process of facilitating critical consciousness - drawing out people's latent dissatisfaction and sense of injustice, challenging the everyday understandings and ruling-class myths controlling consciousness (including the myth that the oppressed cannot change their situation), and deepening understanding of the political-economic structures which shape the possibilities for and constraints on the oppressed
- popular theatre as a form of confidence-building - enabling people to overcome fears and rationalizations, to find their own voice (the courage to express their own thoughts including criticism and protest), to build up a sense of individual identity and a collective identity, and to develop the courage, self-confidence, and organizational strength to resist oppression
- popular theatre as part of an organizing process: theatre as part of a process of building up the collective unity of a group or community, of building alliances with other groups, and of organizing collective action.

The following sections will set out the practical experience in popular theatre, using as a framework a model which synthesizes some of this experience. The model suggests that there is a roughly common process followed by popular theatre workers, which is set out below.



PHASE 1: POPULAR EDUCATION AND FIRST STAGE PARTICIPATION

The starting point is people's own participation. In a traditional nonformal education or development program the adult participant is put at a disadvantage. The experience is an alien one, the learning materials are framed by the educator or produced outside the community, and people's "participation" is limited to the passive consumption of the cultural products transmitted by the educator. Contrast this with the start of a conscientization theatre program in Zimbabwe:

> We started off with an exchange of songs, teaching some ourselves and asking the villagers to teach us some. This set the right spirit - of greetings, of two-way learning, of solidarity - and inspired the village women who simply took over the session and turned it into a spontaneous celebration. The tremendous outpouring of songs, dances, and games showed we would have no trouble getting the villagers to participate. If anything, we would need to "shake a leg" - several legs - to match their spirit! The villagers saw that they had relevant skills and experiences to contribute and that their ideas and performaces were crucial to the process. It showed we could achieve a genuine dialogue and collaboration, with initiative coming as much from them as from us.
>
> The next day we began to analyze with the villagers the problems they had raised on the first day. The initial songs, dances, and games flowed naturally into role-playing and we discovered that these simple role-plays put on by the villagers clarified their perspectives and analysis in a much richer way than through formalized discussion. At the same time we saw that the role-plays themselves could be the starting point for the dramatization-analysis process.
>
> The role-plays exhibited a mixture of (a) truly popular themes - e.g. scenes showing villagers' involvement in the struggle against the Smith regime, and (b) themes reflecting traditional morality and the inherent ideology of dominant class-gender interests - e.g. a play on teenage pregnancy showed the father disowning the daughter and divorcing the mother.

This example shows that peasants can participate more effectively in a process which is drawn from their own cultural context rather than one imposed from outside. The context in this case was the pungwe, a highly participatory form of cultural celebration, learning, and mobilization which emerged in Zimbabwe during the liberation war. The war effort required an ongoing dialogue with, politicization of, and active effort from the peasants. Long exhortatory speeches turned peasants off. But when the speeches were shortened and combined with songs and dances, or when the same themes were conveyed through short sketches, the villagers responded with enthusiasm. When the villagers themselves became major actors and co-organizers of the event, their interest and support increased. The skits, songs, dances and poetry became an effective cover for the clandestine meetings and at the same time conveyed the ideas and

spirit of the revolution. It was highly participatory - villagers and fighters acted out and danced their commitments and built up their morale through collective music-making.

The Zimbabwe experience showed that people's own forms of expression can be an important starting point for a conscientization process. People's testimonies, songs, sketches, dances, poetry, drumming, etc., are something that people are good at, and this initial experience of achievement reinforces their self-confidence and sparks their interest.

> In many communities of limited literacy, the habitual response is: "We can't speak, we have no education". There is a belief in educational inferiority and there seems to be almost a compulsion for self-denigration before the mystique of education. Yet many people in these communities, because they are not influenced or inhibited by extensive schooling, have a great oral tradition of story-telling, versifying, singing, and so on. They can be witty and colourful and the language is sometimes richer than the homogenized textbook variety. Making use of this talent can change attitudes towards the educational mystique.

Cultural expression is a form of "literacy" which peasants already have access to. It is often their way of "reading the world" - an understanding which has often eluded them through other learning processes, including dialogue, whose methods and conventions they have not been tutored in. Using their own means of interpreting the world helps them to articulate their own analysis and to participate more actively in the educational process.

This is, of course, different from the "folk media" strategy described earlier (for example, the Indian Song and Drama program) in which the people's own familiar modes of performance are used to propagate the messages of modernization. In the Zimbabwean case the peasants are using their own cultural forms to express their own ideas. "Folk media" projects, on the other hand, use the people's media simply as a more persuasive way of convincing the people to accept the products and messages of modernization.

Use of cultural expression can be the ice-breaker. Augusto Boal discovered this after failing to spark an active response from campesinos through a verbal dialogue at the first stage of a conscientization program in Peru:

> Silence for them was a weapon. For me that was exasperating. I talked and talked and they just stared at me. Finally I said "If you don't want to speak, at least show something, show an image." (Michalski, 1980).

Boal also discovered that in this initial phase exercises could be used -- not only to stimulate expression and participation but also to reinforce identity, to make the campesinos more critically aware of themselves as agricultural workers, as people who lived by selling their labour power. The exercises made them recognize the capacity and limitations of their bodies and realize how their bodies had been shaped by the oppressive working conditions -- e.g. their backs deformed by long hours bent over in the fields. This fresh perception of themselves deepended their class consciousness.

Zimbabwe's pungwe is not only a forum for grassroots expression; it is also a gathering for learning. The pungwe, the fiesta (Latin America), and the potlatch (Kwakiutl Indians, western Canada) are just a few examples of communal celebrations which function as learning events. These are people's own forms of education, which are decidedly communal and reinforce collective identity and cooperative spirit. In adult education where group learning is an enshrined principle, we often forget that communal learning was a major form of learning in pre-capitalist society and that in many parts of the Third World it remains a vital feature of community life, despite the inroads of capitalist penetration. By building on these spontaneous forms of popular education, we are revitalizing people's own culture, bringing their own creative forces to bear on the development process, and using the ways of learning that people are used to.

The pungwe also represents popular organization and peasant capacity for organization. The peasants not only perform in it but also organize it. It is their initiative, not something externally induced. In building on and extending something which is already organized and controlled by the people, there is a greater chance of popular control over the educational process and long-term, self-reliant continuation of the educational process. At the same time, one is reinforcing an existing organizational structure which might be used for other purposes. (For example, in Brazil one of the most effective organizations for mobilizing self-help community development is the community-based samba associations, who have broadened their sphere of interest from a narrow preoccupation with cultural activity.)

The use of people's own songs, skits, and dances at the same time revitalizes and gives recognition to the people's own culture, which has been denigrated and undermined by the dominant culture. It says that peasant and workers can make culture, can transform the world -- not just the dominant class. The medium becomes part of the message -- that people's own forms of expression are something of value in themselves, at the same time that they are a powerful force for learning, self-expression, collective expression, participation, etc. This helps to increase people's confidence in themselves and in their traditions.

People's expressive culture, however, is more than performance "forms." Their songs, dances, sketches, poetry, etc., reflect their own experience, knowledge, feelings, concerns and aspirations. These are the starting point for conscientization -- the subject-matter for the learning process.

Nonetheless, we must not over-romanticise the people's knowledge which, as the Zimbabwean example shows, is riddled with class and gender contradictions reflecting the ideological conditions of the society in which they live. The Latin Americans make an important distinction between

(a) people's culture -- the spontaneous expression of the people which has imbedded within it both elements representing popular experience and popular interest, and elements reflecting ruling-class ideology; and
(b) popular culture -- that which is built out of those aspects of people's culture that reflect their true interest, e.g. elements of protest and resistance against the structures of domination (Nunez, 1981)

The role of popular theatre or popular education is to enable the people to discover those genuine popular elements and to analyze the ruling-class myths imbedded in their own spontaneous cultural expression.

Phase 2: Rehearsing the Transformation: Theatre as Conscientization

Of course, mere expression is only the starting point. Drawing out people's grievances, concerns, hopes and dissatisfaction is an important step in building participation and critical consciousness, but the process must go further. The next step is to enable participants to

- get a more critical understanding of the source of their oppression
- overcome fears and rationalizations and learn to stand up to victimization, manipulation, exploitation, etc.
- resolve the conflicts and tensions among themselves and build up a group identity
- develop confidence in their capacity to make changes
- strategize on ways of transforming reality.

This confidence-building, awareness-raising, solidarity-building and strategizing is what Freire set out to achieve through his "pedagogy of the oppressed", which provided the initial model for conscientization theatre work. In Freire's model, codifications or visual representations (drawings, photographs, slides etc) of major issues facing the participants are created by the educator or externally produced by the educational agency. These codifications are presented in the study group and decodified by the learners, a process through which the participants discuss the implications and underlying meanings of each of the issues.

Some of the earlier experiments in popular theatre adopted this model without modification. Groups of middle-class activists produced plays based on their research into and analysis of the peasants' (or workers') reality and performed them for peasants (or workers) as the stimulus for group or community discussion. The problem with this approach is that it easily succumbed to the "banking" disease of conventional communication. Once again analysis tended to be propagated from above and preached as a faith rather than rationalized through people's own processes of reflection and dialogue. Developmentalist modernization simply became replaced by class struggle as the subject matter of the plays. The well-made plays and the finished analysis left little room for the peasants to make their own analysis. The discussion tacked on at the end often became an empty ritual, since there was nothing to talk about: the analysis had already been done. Once again the peasants were forced into their conventional role of receiving ideas and analysis from the outside, robbed of an opportunity to voice their own concerns and do their own thinking.

What became clear was that the codification phase -- making the plays and in the process discussing and analyzing the issues -- was a key stage of the work. The way forward was to get the peasants involved in this phase, making the plays themselves. Putting the drama-making and analysis into their hands not only increased their participation in and control over the learning process, but also changed its nature.

In the Freirian prototype, codification and decodification are separate activities: codification is done by the educator and excludes the participants; it is simply a preparatory phase for the decodification in which the participants are involved. The codes are fixed, unchanging representations of reality, giving a single-dimensional image of the issue; once their meaning has been "mined", they have no further value.

However, once codification becomes part of the learning process (and not simply a preparatory phase), it can be combined with decodification to produce a far more dynamic pedagogy, one in which the two processes become dialectical counterpoints with the one giving rise to the other. The codes are not longer static, fixed representations; the dramas can be changed and rechanged to spark off discussion on other dimensions of the same issue. The drama becomes more than a mirror: it becomes a tool of analysis, a means of raising contradictions, a way of testing out ideas and seeing the implications of various courses of action.

Drama lends itself to this more dynamic process. It is malleable: it can be changed easily. In fact, it is a totally different type of codification than the picture or slides which Freire's method is normally associated with. (It is a much richer, more multi-dimensional medium than pictures of photos, with a greater capacity for reflecting complex issues.) Its greater transform-

ability is partly to do with the fact that it is less dependent on specialist skills or technology (as in the case of pictures or slides).

It is this capacity for transformation which ultimately makes it a more powerful tool for conscientization and in fact changes the nature of the conscientization process, as Freire described it. Instead of a finalized performance serving as a mirror (codification) for discussion, the drama-making process (codification) coupled with discussion (decodication) becomes the core learning process. Codification and decodification are combined in a cyclical and organic way: the dramatized images of reality create the focus for discussion which then turns back to drama-making in order to reflect and concretize the analysis.

Acting out the situation brings out in a natural way some of the underlying contradictions, motivations, or rationalizations which help to explain the problem or the reason why it remains unsolved (e.g. class or gender interests, market or production relations). The subsequent discussion draws out these underlying structures and contradictions and makes them clearer. Further dramatization then makes the analysis concrete and at the same time throws up new perspectives which are then discussed. Further drama-making can also be used to try out different strategies for transforming the situation, and through this revealing the consequences of various strategies or the obstacles to change. The play keeps changing as the understanding of the participants deepens. Each time it reflects their new analysis or a new attempt to transform reality. In short, the scenario-making process -- of making and remaking the drama -- become the conscientization process: each fresh attempt at restructuring the drama reveals a new layer of reality.

The code then is no longer the fixed, static image. It is the drama-which-is-never-finished, constantly being restructured to extend the insights of the participants. Nothing is presented as a final statement: each new scene is questioned, challenged, and probed for deeper meaning.

The learning is no longer restricted to the decodification process. The thinking, the discussion also goes on in making the codes, in improvising the drama. The peasants -- the actors -- have to think through how they will respond in different situations, in different relationships. Through acting out these situations they begin to see the roots of their problems, to test out alternative strategies, and to see the implications of each course of action. The thinking, the analysis goes on within each improvisation as well as after it.

The improvisations also bring out unanticipated contradictions which a purely analytical or dialogical process might have missed.

The way people spontaneously respond to different dramatized situations shows the calculus of class and gender in a much richer way than mere discussion. For example,

- a petty trader (in the drama) asked to represent the demands of a group of farmers goes into the bureaucrat's office and, once alone, does a deal for himself
- a farmer making no headway with an office clerk who is ignoring him instinctively reaches into his pocket for a bribe
- a farmer playing the role of a bureaucrat known exactly how an official would react to a group of farmers invading his office -- he kicks them out.

At each of these points the action could be stopped and the issue raised.

Finally, codification (drama-making) can be used to plan and rehearse how to transform the world. Participants can use the drama-making as a way of testing out their ideas and strategies for overcoming oppression. It is no mere discussion of possibilities: they can rehearse those possibilities and test out their appropriateness and implications before actually doing them in real life.

A point made earlier needs to be echoed again in this context: the drama-making is not only an expressive activity which the peasants are good at; it also represents a form of analysis which they find much easier to work with than the conventions of dialogue, which have a built-in intellectual bias.

As a tool for confidence-building, this process has advantages over the Freirian one. In the Freirian process, confidence-building remains an intellectualized activity; participants gain confidence through recognizing that they create culture and that they have knowledge -- useful insights to being to bear on the analysis of their social reality. (Confidence also develops through seeing that they can make words, they can "name the word.") In the conscientization theatre, confidence-building is much less intellectualized: participants gain confidence by seeing through their own dramatic actions that they can change things, that they have optional ways of responding to various situations, that given some practice they can face up to their oppressors. Through the process of changing and rechanging the drama, the peasants experience a process of transformation (a dramatized one) which gives them the courage to make those changes in their real (rather than dramatic) lives.

Phase 3: Transforming the World: Organization and Action

But conscientization also has its activist dimension. People don't become critically conscious only through talk or through "rehearsing information on the stage". The beginning of true

conscientization comes through action, through collective attempts to transform the world.* People have to act, to get off the stage and transform things in real life, and a precondition for this is collective organizing. Through organizing and action, people deepen their understanding of class contradictions and the structures which keep them oppressed, and begin to see that they can change things, that they can take greater control over their lives. (And well-planned actions not only increase people's sense of power or self-confidence, but also augment their real power in relation to dominant groups.)

This point was grossly underestimated in some of the earlier experiments in popular theatre which assumed that the performance activity on its own would act as a catalyst for community action (e.g. Laedza Batanani). What quickly became clear was that theatre on its own could bring people together and create a forum for awareness-raising and discussion, but it would not create the conditions for organized action. Without links to local organizations or to a process for organizing people around the issues, the experience normally ended with the end of the theatre activity.

For example, the annual performances of Laedza Batanani rarely culminated in action because there was no strong community organization to mobilize people around the issues raised by the performance and Laedza Batanani itself did nothing to reinforce or strengthen communication organization. The Nigerian workshops showed farmers the possibilities for action on the stage but they did not give the farmers the organizational skills nor lead to the creation of a farmers' organization which could carry out the actions they had rehearsed in the drama. (In contrast, the dramatized rehearsal of a struggle in ACPC's case has validity because the drama activity is rooted in an organizing process and is therefore a preparatory step in launching real action).

These experiences showed the limitations of what Encalada has called "convocatory" communication -- communication which simply calls people together for a single event without any organizational base. It prompted a much more realistic assessment of the strengths and limitations of popular theatre and a demystification of the earlier naive view of popular theatre as a "catalyst" --

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* In the assessment of Freire's work in Brazil a misinterpretation is often made that his conscientization work was a precondition for political action, that it triggered off a revolutionary movement. In fact, as Freire has clarified in Pedagogy in Process, his work evolved in response to peasant and worker struggles (1978, p.110). Thus conscientization became an additional tool for deepening class consciousness, sharpening the perception of the contradictions in the social relations of production and heightening worker's struggle (which was already going on).

the view that "media" some can stimulate a process of community animation.

The approach had to be turned around so that theatre was no longer seen as the whole or central experience but as one of a number of mutually reinforcing activities in an educational and organizing process. The theatre aspect had to be played down and the organizing aspect given more attention. Drama-making had to be complemented by a conscious process of organizing -- of bringing people together with common interests, of overcoming tensions and conflicts between them, and of building their unity and strength through collective discussion and through working together to solve their problems. Spontaneous bursts of action might take place without organization, but organization is a necessary precondition for a durable and successful transformation.

Part of the problem, then -- and this is common to many media-based approaches to community animation -- is looking at the media as the salvation, the quick-and-easy answer to complex problems. When media is given this disproportionate emphasis or "salvationist role" of "single-handedly sparking social change," it reinforces the dominant idealogy that change only happens through miracles, not through organized action, and

> punctures people's balloon with a stage catharsis, allowing the audience to feel that it no longer needs to achieve catharsis in the real struggle outside the theatre's doors. (Brookes, 1982)

The transitory nature of performance also prompted this reassessment. Performances are one-off activities and as such cannot by themselves produce the sustained organizing needed to bring about change. They can focus people's energies, heighten people's awareness, or reinforce people's morale, but they cannot by themselves do the organizing.

To be effective, therefore, popular theatre needs to be seen as part of an ongoing educational and organizing process in which people not only come together but are drawn into an organizational framework in which they develop unity and common understanding and work together. The process begins before the theatre activity and continues on after it is over. Experience in this more radical approach to popular theatre has largely come from Asia and Latin America, where activists involved in popular movements have tried out and evolved strategies for integrating theatre activity into a sustained educational and organizing process -- a means of building up the confidence, analysis, and organizational unity of popular sectors.

ACPC and Proshika are representative of the Asian experience in this field. These organizations were formed in the '70s in response to the deepening crisis in agriculature (in particular the growing landlessness and unemployment) and in reaction to conventional development programs which reinforced the crisis or papered over its bad effects. The latter included programs such as

- agricultural co-ops and Green Revolution capitalization schemes whose resources were monopolized by the richer farmers
- community development schemes which extracted voluntary labour from underpaid or unemployed landless labourers for infrastructural projects often benefiting the large landowners
- the Indian Sarvodaya movement which has failed to bring about structural change (i.e. land reform and the ending of class and caste oppression) through "change of heart" appeals to the dominant classes on behalf of the exploited (rather than mobilizing the landless labourers to exert pressure themselves for change).

These animation groups eschewed a community development or "class collaboration" approach (which invariably worked in the interests of the more powerful rural classes) and instead worked exclusively with the marginal farmers, landless agricultural labourers, Harijans, Adivasis, etc. who had been left out of or failed to benefit from the state-supported modernization schemes. Their idea was to help the powerless and exploited get organized so that they could break out of their dependence on moneylenders, landlords, etc., challenge the victimization, manipulation and exploitation they faced, and make demands on government for the reforms and resources it had promised.

These groups had been influenced by Paulo Freire yet recognized the limitations of Freirian experiments which talked about oppression but developed no organizational strategies for challenging the oppression. They placed a high priority on organization and action, seeing the process of organizing as the experience through which the oppressed would build up their confidence and deepen their understanding as well as preparing the ground for effective action to redress their exploited situation. Their central goal was the development of people's organizations, generated and led by the people themselves, which could defend and advance popular interests. They stressed the importance of these organizations being run by the oppressed.

The organizing process varies from group to group, but a number of things are common to them:

- starting out with a discussion among the rural poor on why they remain poor and oppressed
- translating that discussion into relevant and manageable actions through which a unity and self-confidence can be developed
- taking on more ambitious struggles as the confidence and organizational strength grows
- transferring the learning and experience to others who have not yet organized, encouraging them to start similar actions and developing joint action and communication.

Theatre can play a supportive role in each of these stages. The diagram below shows how ACPC integrates theatre into their educational and organizing process. In the initial period the ACPC animateur organizes community literacy sessions (a non-contentious activity from the point of view of the landlords) as the pretext for

community consciousness-raising discussions. Short villager-produced sketches start each discussion on issues such as unemployment, caste victimization, low wages, high prices, lack of government-promised services, alcoholism, etc. Afterwards the animateur encourages the Harijans to talk about their own experiences of these issues, to see the objective reality of exploitation, and to examine why these problems remain unsolved, getting them to bring out their fears and dependency on the landlord and at the same time to draw out the information on successful organizing experiences by other landless labourers to show that they can do something. Group singing reinforces this process, which culminates in a number of actions on "winnable" issues by the community (e.g. exerting pressure on the bureaucracy for services promised in the Development Plan) which further strengthens their confidence and unity.

In the next stage, a group of younger, more militant Harijans is formed to take the leadership in building the landless labourers' movement and in organizing further actions. This gives the work a much broader focus than the earlier single-issue actions. The leadership group goes through a further conscientization process led by the animateur. Drama again plays a role, primarily as a form of role-playing to prepare the leaders for confrontations and negotiations with bureaucrats, landlords, etc. The animatuer, for example, plays a bureaucrat and the members take turns

presenting their case to the "official". After each practice session they discuss how they could improve their performance. Through this process they overcome their fear of authority figures, and work out who is going to speak, what points are going to be made, what reaction they should expect from the official, what their counter-response is to be, etc.

During this same period the community needs to be kept "on board": drama serves to broaden their vision and to share what is learned in the leadership group sessions. Community performances are also put on in preparation for each successive action; the drama clarifies the target for the struggle, arouses people's emotional commitment, and draws out their ideas on how to carry it out. The leadership group also puts on performances in neighbouring communities when the struggle requires a more broad-based effort.

Once the struggles are underway, drama and songs can help to build up people's morale and solidarity during the strike, occupation, gherao, march, etc. At this latter stage the struggles involve larger issues which often require more protracted effort; drama and songs play an important role in keeping the unity and spirit alive. While this has not been the experience of ACPC, theatre can also be used as a form of protest, exposing and confronting incidents of victimization, corruption, etc. For example, the peasants in Ayni Ruway use theatre as a means of speaking out against bureaucrats or middlemen who are trying to manipulate, cheat, harass, or humiliate them.

Theatre is also used as a tool for confrontation, for waging struggle. It is a form of symbolic action against injustice. For example, in one Philippines squatter community faced with eviction, a squatters' union came up with an ingenious mixture of drama and religious symbolism to stop the bulldozers from destroying their homes. They organized a mass demonstration within the cover of a religious play (since demonstrations are banned under martial law). They dramatized the Exodus story of the Angel of Death who kills the first-born sons of the Egyptians but spares those of the Israelites who protected themselves by marking their doors with blood. They produced posters bearing the slogan "We will not leave this place". At the climax of the drama the "Moses" actor blessed each poster and put it on the door of each house explaining: "Whoever destroys this house will be cursed by God".

In the Philippines, a very religious country, a curse is the strongest way of making the oppressor think twice before doing anything against whatever is sacred. This ruse kept the bulldozers at bay, helped make the people feel secure, and played a key role in the squatters' victory.

In Bangladesh, where the landless groups have become strong enough theatre serves as a powerful means of openly confronting injustice. This tactic has proven so successful that in some areas the mere threat of "putting the landlords on the the stage" has been enough to rein in the landlords' corrupt or manipulative

practices. Of course, in the end theatre cannot make revolution: it can only be a form of support for revolution. In Nicaragua, for example, campesino theatre groups in the end had to stop "acting" the revolution against Somoza and to start doing it -- to take up arms and join the freedom-fighters.

Drama serves as a powerful means of horizontal communication, extending the experience of people's organization to others and encouraging them to organize themselves. Landless groups in Bangladesh put on dramas in neighbouring villages in order to win solidarity for their struggles (e.g. persuading their fellow landless to resist being recruited as scabs) or to encourage other landless to form their own groups. The Kamiriithu literacy group used drama to share their discussions with and mobilize the larger community.

Of course, this kind of work doesn't go on without a reaction from the dominant class. In Bangladesh the landlords try to stop the rehearsals and performances, send thugs to beat up the performers, and prevent the groups from using public facilities (e.g. schoolyards) for performing. Once the animateur leaves, they attempt to take the theatre activity over, paying the landless to perform on the landlords' issues. In India ACPC and similar organizations face physical violence from the landlords and persecution from the authorities. In Jamaica, Sistren were among the first to be laid off the government job-creation program when the new IMF-backed Seaga government came to power. In Nicaragua, campesino theatre groups who were protesting against the Somoza regime faced fierce repression: one group had to burn all of its props and flee the area to evade reprisals by Somoza's National Guard.

In summary, popular theatre as part of an organizing process can play a range of roles: bringing people together and building organizational unity; drawing out participation and the expression of people's own experience, concerns, aspirations and analysis; overcoming people's fears and building confidence; deepening people's understanding; facilitating processes of planning and strategizing; clarifying the target for a specific struggle and assuring support; communicating horizontally with other groups and communities and building mutual support; protesting against oppression and challenging the oppressor; morale-building during the struggle; evaluation of and/or celebration of the struggle.

THE ROLE OF THE ANIMATEUR

The role of the animateur in popular theatre work needs some clarification. In the account so far it has been assumed rather than clearly defined.

To begin with, there is a need for an animateur, someone who can organize the unorganized, assist them to build up their courage and confidence, cultivate and encourage their own

leadership, and move on to other areas or support other groups when the leaders are strong enough to manage on their own. This role is different from that of conventional extension work; it is not one of telling the peasants or workers what to do, but of drawing out the peasants' own capacity for analyzing their situation and deciding on what must be done.

Animateurs are often middle-class activists but they need not be. Proshika has discovered that some of the leaders of the landless groups themselves can make equally effective animateurs. Their involvement as animateurs has grown organically out of the process of building a landless labourers' movement, the landless themselves recognizing that the strength of their movement requires more landless being "brought on board". ACPC's animateurs are primarily educated Harijans who, although not facing the same economic oppression, experience the same social oppression, and ostracism that their fellow Harijans do.

The selection of animateurs also relates to the "entry point" -- the initial phase of starting the work in an area. It is commonly agreed that this stage should be low-key in order to avoid provoking opposition from the local elite before the landless are strong enough to face up to this kind of pressure. Proshika selects its animateurs from the areas in which the animation work is to be done, to reduce the initial visibility of the work -- no animateurs are parachuted into an area from the outside (although the animateurs are trained outside the area).

The animation role is a complex one. To begin with, it is a "back-seat" rather than "front-line" role, one of inspiring, encouraging, and supporting the initiatives and emerging leadership of others. In intervening to break the landless' silent-patron relationship with the rural elite, the animateur has to be careful to avoid introducing a new form of dependence. In the beginning this dependence may be unavoidable since the animateur, through his status and contacts, can help to protect or shelter the landless while they are getting organized. However, over time the animateur needs to withdraw from this leadership role and allow the landless, through their organization and their own leaders, to face up to this pressure.

Animation is not manipulation. It must be done in a way that gives the landless control over the organizing process, drawing out their analysis, their strategizing, their organizing, and their leadership so that they understand the process and take the initiatives. This work cannot be rushed. A highly participatory process takes time: only when people are fully involved in the decision-making will they feel a sense of ownership over the process and want to continue it.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown how theatre can be used as a medium for expanding participation and self-confidence and expressing

popular concerns and analysis; as a dynamic process for generating critical consciousness and as a form of role-playing to rehearse transformative action; and as an organizational and confrontational tool for struggle.

It also demonstrated the importance of the operational and historical context in which theatre is used, in determining whether the theatre program leads to empowerment and structural transformation. It is not enough simply to express problems (through theatre) if this is not linked with critical study of and action on the underlying causes and structures; it is not enough to rehearse struggle if this does not lead to struggle.

Popular theatre on its own will never be anything more than an interesting and exciting spectacle, a chance to let out grievances and frustrations. It will work as a medium for empowerment and structural transformation only when it is woven into an ongoing process of critical analysis, organizing, and struggle.

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THIRD WORLD POPULAR THEATRE

Michael Etherton

The February sun had disappeared beyond the flat paddyfields of the village on the Bangladesh flood-plain. Within the homestead, to which we had walked 6 miles to join in some drama performances, the evening light was hidden by the huts and the high bamboo. A crouching, passive woman lit the bush-lamps. Our elderly genial host, a landless wage-labourer nick-named 'Landlord', looked on.

Once it was dark, and the people had eaten and prayed, they began to drift into the homestead. Most were members of the organized landless group in this village. We were part of a team of animateurs, who had come together for a workshop nearby, and were responding to requests from a number of landless groups for some experience of drama as a tool in helping the groups to understand their problems and making those groups more cohesive.

We had been in this village and this homestead on two previous evenings. We had sat crowded together under the cotton canopy in the yard with about 100 other adults, and lots of children. The landless had discussed their problems: especially the crippling boycott by the local landlords of their co-operative irrigation scheme. They were also concerned whether or not to bring into their organization marginal peasants - that is, peasants who had a bit of land, but not sufficient to live off all the time. They thought it might help them to dramatize some of their problems. We listened to the discussions carefully. We agreed that we would do a play if they would. We would meet the next evening but one.

We developed a play with some other villagers, musicians and animateurs and returned with it to the village two evenings later. Other animateurs had in the meantime worked with some of the group there. The two plays were shown to a small group of the landless labourers. They watched our play intently; and then suggested that they would perform it themselves the next night, with some modifications, for all the landless in the village. The following is the scenario, in English, of the first part of the play, in Bangla, which they showed to about 200 adults in 'Landlord's' compound:

The Dastanagar Play

A very poor wage-labourer, Abdulwahid, once had some land which he farmed; but he lost it to the landlords. Now he is looking for some casual wage-labour. He meets some of his fellow landless labourers. They are trying to get everyone in their

situation to agree, as the planting season comes round, not to work for any landlord for less than 6 thaka per day.

Abdulwahid agrees; and returns to his hut and his wife Khana ...

The next day, desperate for some money to buy a little food, Abdulwahid and Khana wander through the village hoping to find some labouring work. They pass by a peasant farmer, Tara Miha, working in his fields. This man actually needs some help in digging his fields for planting, for they are just too much for him to cope with on his own. But he doesn't let on about this to Abdulwahid.

Tara Miha is not a wealthy man. He owns only a little land; and in his pocket at this moment there are only a few notes and coins. He offers Abdulwahid, upon some private calculation, 4 thaka a day. Abdul refuses. He tells the farmer that all the landless labourers have agreed to work for not less than 6 thaka per day: the minimum wage.

Tara Miha laughs.

'Minimum?' he exclaims. 'We shall see.'

Khana is conscious only of her starving child. She was excluded from the men's discussions over a minimum wage: it was not customary for women to join in talk with the men ...

'Here is work,' she tells her husband. 'Refuse it, and the next man along this road will take it. You are lucky to get here first.'

Abdulwahid wavers. He bargains with Tara Miha.

Tara Miha looks scornful. '4 is what you worked for before; 4 is what you will work for today ... Don't worry. Someone coming along this road will work for 4 thaka for me.'

'He's right,' says Khana to her husband. 'We need food.'

So Abdulwahid agrees. Khana whispers: 'Ask him if I can work as well ...'

Tara Miha looks at her, then at the digging to be done in his fields; and he does another calculation.

'Alright,' he says. 'If you insist. But women only work for 2 thaka ...;

It is now Khana's turn to argue with her husband who urges her to accept.

'That will make the 6 thaka minimum,' he tells her.

'But there are two of us labouring now for one wage!' she exclaims.

'You are not a labourer,' Tara Miha tells her. 'You're a woman.'

They take up their tools; and Tara is able to stretch out beneath one of his palm-trees. As Abdulwahid and his wife toil in his fields he holds forth to them about how he and the other landlords will break the irrigation scheme of the landless labourers' co-operative. Abdul is not a member of this co-operative and so pays no attention.

At this point, the leader of the landless labourers' action group and irrigation co-operative comes by. His name is Rajaq. He sees his comrade Abdul labouring in the fields and gives him a cheery greeting.

'So,' Rajaq calls out, 'You have made our friend Tara Miha agree to pay you the minimum wage. Well done!'

'Don't answer him,' Khana says apprehensively. But Rajaq hears her. 'You're not working for less than the minimum, are you, Abdulwahid?' he asks.

Silence. Abdul and Khana labour on.

Rajaq insists: 'How much exactly are you working for?'

'What business is it of yours, anyway,' mutters Abdul, digging vigourously to hide his anger and his shame.

'Quite right,' agrees Tara Miha, who has strolled over to the little group in the middle of the field. 'It is none of your business. He agreed to work for 4 thaka. So much for your minimum!'

Rajaq is furious. He remonstrates with Abdul and Khana. 'You agreed?' he exclaims. 'How can you break your solemn agreement with us? This is terrible!' And, in his frustration, he tries to drag Abdul off the land.

Tara Miha starts abusing Rajaq, provoking him. Rajaq becomes so angry with Tara that he is about to commit some violence upon his person. Abdulwahid intervenes. Together, he and Tara throw Rajaq off the field and send him sprawling into the dust of the road.

'Don't you see?' Rajaq yells at Abdulwahid. 'You are joining with your enemy to fight your friend! In defeating me, you are defeating yourself!'

'What does he mean?' asks Khana.

'O, Khana,' Rajaq says, 'You must hold out for the minimum wage.'

Khana says: 'But we have got to eat.'

'You will eat - only if you hold out for the minimum,' says Rajaq. He dusts himself off as he goes down the road.

Tara Miha orders Abdul and Khana back onto the land. As they resume their labours he becomes angry with them for, as he says, working so slowly, and for their seeming inability to follow his instructions. He shouts abuse at them and becomes the very image of the overbearing landlord. And, truth to tell: he has only a little bit of land - which he may lose by next season.

He does not notice that another man has appeared at the far side of the field: a man dressed in a white dhoti and carrying a black umbrella. This is Hydah, the leader of the village council, a peasant landlord and moneylender. Hydah is waiting for Tara Miha.

'Where is the interest on the money which I lent you?' he asks him roughly. 'The interest is now overdue.'

Tara's behaviour changes. He becomes passive - not unlike the way Abdulwahid behaved towards him. Hydah reminds Tara that the loan was for fertilizer, which has now arrived in the village.

'More time, sir,' pleads Tara Miha.

But Hydah gets tough, in a quiet way. If he doesn't pay the agreed interest today then Hydah will haul him into the court and have his land given as surety off him.

Abdulwahid and Khana listen to this exchange uncomprehendingly. Tara goes aside and furtively counts the notes and coins he has tucked about his person. It is not enough to pay Hydah and the two labourers. He explains this to the audience; and does another private calculation. Then Tara takes Hydah to the edge of the field: some today; and some tomorrow. He gives Hydah 3 of the 6 thaka he has on him. Hydah is barely satisfied; but he goes on his way.

The day is almost over; and the work is done. Abdul and his wife, exhausted, are sustained by the thought of some money, and then, with it, some food. They wait for Tara Miha to pay them.

This is the moment Tara Miha has not allowed himself to contemplate throughout the afternoon.

He gives 3 thaka - the remainder of the money he has on him - to Abdulwahid; and none to Khana.

The labourers are stunned. Then they remonstrate, threaten, plead for the wages originally agreed ... Tara tells Khana to come and get some bowls of rice grains from his own wife. Khana, like her husband, is outraged. She throws herself on the ground before him and clutches at the hem of his cloth.

Tara Miha does the only thing possible in the circumstances; he goes on the attack.

'Go on, beat me up!' he challenges them. 'See what will happen to you in the courts.'

'But ' Abdul complains, 'the man you gave some money to this morning is the chairman of the court.'

'Exactly,' says Tara, triumphantly. 'If you bring me to the court, do you think my friend Hydah will decide in your favour?'

This confuses Abdul and Khana, for it did not seem to them that Hydah was Tara Miha's friend this morning. On the other hand, Tara did give Hydah some money ...

As husband and wife falter, Tara becomes tough.

'Clear off my land!' he shouts at them. 'I've paid you, so clear off.'

'Was this the man you stopped Rajaq from thrashing this morning?' Khana asks her husband.

'Was this the man,' counters Abdul, 'you told me to work for this morning for less than the agreed minimum?'

The land is now ready for planting; and as the two labourers go off, weary and cheated, Tara Miha looks at it with pride.

A group of their landless friends, with Rajaq amongst them, meet them on the way. Abdul is shamed; and, at first, loathe to tell them of the outcome. But when he does, Rajaq and the friends rally round them. They are genuinely sorry.

'I told you,' says Rajaq. 'If you show weakness they are encouraged to cheat you even more.'

Abdul then tells them about the visit of Hydah. Rajaq laughs. 'Poor Tara Miha!' he exclaims, 'doesn't he know that Hydah is cheating him? Exploiting him? Hydah will soon have his bit of land off him. And then Tara himself will join us as one of the landless ...'

The discussion now returns to the minimum wage. Abdulwahid now is the one persuading all the others not to work for below the agreed minimum wage.

'Let them see we are solidly together,' says another of the landless, 'and they will be scared to pay any one of us less than the minimum. For if they do, we'll all come and beat them up.'

'Labouring women are labourers too!' Khana suddenly adds. 'We must be paid the same. And we must be included in your discussions ...'

At this point the play tended to become more discussion among all present than acted drama; and before the play continued into the next part - which was about Hydah and fertilizer swindling - the landless labourers who had acted in the play had found a space between the play's fiction and the reality of their situation to forge a clear agreement among all those present not to work for less than the agreed minimum. There was also further strategizing about the landlord's boycott of their co-operative's pump.

Then one of the animateurs raised this sense of collective awareness by singing the folk songs he and the musicians had been rehearsing with new words, contradicting the old fatalism of the songs, new words of hope and resolution. The animateur asked the landless group's leader to sing the song; but the man sang instead another song with his own new words.

Thus the evening continued, with awareness growing through the dramas and discussions and songs. Above all, though, everybody was enjoying themselves; and it is worth noting that the scenario, plus others, was the outcome of only 3 days' work, and an expression of the growing understanding amongst all of us.

Popular theatre, popular drama, in the context of the Third World must be a grass-roots initiative. It is not a question of just performing before the masses; it is the oppressed themselves who produce the drama and in the process determine its function.

Popular theatre is not a set of performance skills for anyone to use in order to impose development packages more effectively on those at the base of society. It is, rather, a process of conscientization, and not a product or end in itself. At the same time, 'popular' and 'theatre' are in a dialectical relationship, where popular = political and theatre = art. The more artistic popular theatre becomes the more effective it is politically; and the more political it becomes, the more popular it is.

Popular theatre should not be a sort of 'hit and run' theatre. Sloganizing, reductionism, rhetoric, all have limited use as tools for conscientization. Rather, it is necessary to engage at the grass-roots and help build up the organizational base first. Then drama and theatre can become part of the organization's method of working.

Many animateurs and popular theatre activists in Third World countries are middle-class intellectuals by virtue of their education. But their alienation from the Third World state - and of course from the First World which has determined the nature of these Third World states - is profound. They have problems with their regimes, with their own elites, with militarization; and they also have problems with the organized urban Left. A number have returned to their villages and to poverty, turning their backs upon their assured careers among the petit bourgeoisie. All their energies are directed to change at the very base of society through rural conscientization: in the short term to fight exploiting landlords, beatings and expropriations; in the long term to overthrow a continuing system of exploitation. They run risks. Their only protection is from the most vulnerable, the landless.

In the struggle by the people at the grass-roots for a just and fair society the folk culture is crucially important. The songs, music, stories, dances, masquerades, give life to the emerging organizations among the poorest. It is not a question of preserving a culture, but of transforming it into a culture of liberation. This becomes a means of sharing collectively deep feelings about a world which is individually experienced. These arts transcend barriers of communication when people come together. If people stop coming together to sing, make music, tell stories, celebrate the seasons of the year and the rites of passage - then they will stop coming together. This coming-together is the foundation on which grass-roots consciousness is built.

Popular theatre can take this issue of the popular culture further. It can show how the dominant culture and the dominant history of the imperialists, capitalist and Soviet, have excluded the peasant masses of the Third World from the high culture visions of Utopia. High technology has rubbished the efforts and endeavours of the poor. Popular theatre is never a part of the high culture: distanced, it can therefore objectify it, and so perceive it critically.

Many intellectuals, including engineers, architects, agriculturalists and artists, are increasingly critical of the institutions of their states - institutions to which their abilities and privileged education gives them access. They are also critical of that privileged education, that very structuring of knowledge in the technologically advanced world. Technology today has all the answers; but in a much deeper sense technology and its high culture has no answers at all.

More and more activists believe that a truly revolutionary

process is that which is initiated by the vast, landless, rubbished, rural base, stretching across the Third World, within whose own transforming folk traditions the worth and dignity of each woman, man and child can be reasserted. Raising consciousness, therefore, among these masses involves, as well, raising consciousness in the First and Second Worlds: a matching of understanding and a new knowledge.

CONTINUING THE LITERACY DEBATE

Heribert Hinzen
Deutscher Volkshoschul Verband
Sierra Leone

My misgivings about false ideas and exaggerated expectations concerning the importance of literacy for development and for the individual have, after years of experience and work in the field, unfortunately not diminished. In fact they have grown during my ten year analysis of the problem in my changing, or often simultaneous role as scientist, coordinator of educational aid projects and editor of a periodical. I am of the opinion that one should take one's experience seriously. I therefore wish to reveal my own experience and make it available for others along with all the programmes, statements, reports and recommendations which we otherwise produce as educational politicians, aid administrators, evaluators and researchers. I would like to enrich the necessary discussions and add a new perspective to them. To do this I have chosen the perhaps not so traditional method of confronting you with the voices of those people concerned, with stories and outlines of reports taken from my work without offering any detailed interpretation myself. I hope that this can perhaps lead to a more thoughtful approach to the people in question and their problems. Both deserve it.

The First Story: The Journey of the Professor and the Farmer

Ajay, employee of the private aid organisation Seva Mandir in India, and an experienced homeopath, puppeteer and adult educator, told me this story at the conclusion of the long discussions held during our visits to families, villages and project sites in Rajasthan:

A professor was on his way to an important conference. He was a famous philologist and had two Master of Arts degrees in linguistics. In the same train compartment sat a farmer who was making a trip away from his village for the first time in his life. The professor was reading a newspaper. After a short time he noticed with some astonishment that the farmer sitting opposite him kept turning his head from side to side in order to decipher something in the newspaper. At least he thought he was doing this. The professor generously asked him whether he would like to have part of the newspaper. The farmer politely declined his offer. The professor looked at the farmer and asked him pointedly whether he could read. The farmer hesitated and said no. The professor's astonishment turned to horror: "Then you can't understand half of this world!" he said condescendingly. The farmer hesitated a moment and then asked "Can you read everything?" The professor was now in his element. He calmly began to count out the number of languages he could speak fluently or at least knew well. "You can probably write every word then?" "But, of course!" retorted the professor. The farmer reflected once again and then clicked his tongue loudly several times. "Do you know what

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that is? It's a word which I use to goad on my buffalo when we are working together in the fields." He clicked his tongue once again. "Please write that down for me." The professor looked taken aback and said no he couldn't. After a while he turned disdainfully away. The farmer was surprised and at the same time disappointed. "What, you can't write that? They are the most important words for me at work. They are more than half the world for me. They get everything moving for me!"

The First Travel Sketch:

In the summer of 1982 I was working in India and learnt a lot from the following experience: In the late afternoon we - three employees of the private aid organisation Seva Mandir and myself - set off in a jeep to visit project sites in Udaipur (Rajasthan). Our conversation centred around the living conditions of the people in the villages along the route. The houses lay far apart from one another, about half a kilometre away. In between were fields in which just now - the beginning of the rainy season - the first delicate grain and vegetable shoots were appearing. Bathi told stories of the experiences he had had in the years just past pointing out the situations where development aid had lead to conflict with village tradition: farmers had taken the government's afforestation programme seriously and attacked foresters who had secretly felled trees for their own profit; shop owners were taken to task for their high prices. This was nothing new for the others. It happened again and again in another form with the same result - the rich were becoming richer. To me however the oft-mentioned lack of readiness of the conservative farmers, the illiterates and the poor to change their situation appeared to have developed into the problems that the people wanted to have change and did everything they could to achieve it but were hindered in the process by those in power who acted only in their own interest. How true then is this myth about the lack of flexibility, mobility, motivation and.... In the meantime it had become dark. The headlights showed up the narrow roads and the steep rocky gorges. We continued on uphill. We then left the tar-sealed road and after several kilometres of dirt track we set off cross-country until the jeep came to a halt. They now conferred with one another about the correct way. I couldn't see a way at all as I peered into the night. We were soon on our way again however driving slowly around tight bends, past overgrown and built-up terrain.

Then, in the distance, light. Bathi breathed a sigh of relief. At least someone was in the school although we hadn't announced our coming. We stopped, got out and went into the room which formed the whole school and the whole building. Along the wall sat about 25 young men next to one another and at the front, some distance away, 3 young women. Four oil lamps were scattered throughout the room and produced just enough light for those present to see the writing on the board and the spelling books lying in front of them. A teacher stood at the front and was repeating, together with the participants, the syllables and numbers on the blackboard. We sat down on the floor in front of the class. Somebody pushed a lamp across to us. Hundreds of moths and beetles immediately collected

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around the light, their fluttering of wings and chirping underlining the quiet which had descended. Bathi explained who we were and what we wanted. He willingly answered the many questions and then it was my turn. They were not interested in who I was and what I did. No: what is the situation of farmers in my country? What do they cultivate? What machinery do they use? Do they have good seed and good fertiliser? I had to answer one question after the other. I did this as well as I could. But were my answers accurate and adequate? Can one talk about the farmers in my country? Who cultivates what? Aren't the vegetable and fruit farmers in the district where I live different to the grain and beef farmers? Doesn't my neighbour groan justifiably about the over abundance of work, the bad prices, the rapidly rising costs? But what would he say to the situation of these farmers who are really poor? Indeed: there are farmers and farmers!

Why couldn't I speak Mewari, the language in which my answers were being translated. What sort of dialogue was it?! At last I was able to ask questions. I also started with their living conditions wanting to know how and from what they lived. They almost all had small herds of cattle. The three or four of which they could sell annually brought in the few rupees from which all goods which were neither self-cultivated nor self-produced had to be purchased. They believed this was too little, particularly with the whole family working so hard. A saying of my neighbour at home darted through my head: "Nobody has ever become rich from work!" Hot tea was served, the atmosphere became more relaxed. Three of those present sang folk songs which sounded melancholy to me, the rhythm emphasised by the clapping of the others.

Yes, and then we groped our way forward to the question: "Why do you want to learn to read and write?" I was inquisitive and at the same time perplexed. How could this all fit together? Learning at ten o'clock in the evening five times a week, then the long way home by foot in the dark, getting up at six o'clock in the morning again to work in the fields, and all of that for this meagre existence? What did they expect from the literacy classes? I requested ten of the participants to give their reasons, one after the other, for taking part in the course. They spoke out eagerly, convinced and full of hope. Many repeated the arguments which had gone before and added their own wishes. Sometimes only a few details varied. Five principle points came to the fore:

- The money lenders are deceiving us - we want to know how, we want to be able to check our money and to defend ourselves.
- Our work for which others receive a day's or an hour's wage is paid in the form of goods or written down over a longer period of time - we cannot check this and cannot prove our feeling of being cheated
- The rich are the educated and the educated are the rich people in the village - we want to educate ourselves and then become rich.

- We want to increase our agricultural knowledge; our cows should produce more milk and our fields more profit - how and what do we need to do, this is what we want to learn.

- We want to raise our status in the village, we no longer wish to be seen as the ignorant ones who do not count and we do not need to be listened to. We will soon be educated.

This was the sum total of their hope: putting an end to the colossal poverty, exploitation, suppression and deprivation of rights by means of literacy. It all appeared so self-evident to them! I was speechless. Fortunately I didn't need to say any more for it was already after midnight. They sang some more and I, too, had to sing a German folk song. We then said goodbye and parted. My thoughts were occupied with these desires and hopes. But were they more than illusions? How deep did the thorns of deception, deprivation and harsh living conditions lie? Would the rich, the powerful and the ruling class give them a chance? Would literacy and following efforts at educating themselves prove to be adequate weapons in the struggle against servitude, in the fight for a more human existence.

We drove on for about another hour to a village where Bathi had set up his district office. We slept there for a few hours until the buffalo in the courtyard woke us up in the early morning. I needed some time to orientate myself but the last few hours of the previous evening quickly came back to me. Whilst I was trying to reconcile the optimism of the course participants with my knowledge about the difficulties in developing village structures, my eyes fell on a book in Bathi's bookcase. It was an empirical investigation of literacy work with farmers and tribes (Shrivastava, 1981) in this very area, just recently published. With great curiousity I devoured the first few pages before breakfast. My conflict deepened even further. Secretly I had hoped that my doubts were wrong, at least in this case. Instead of that they were strengthened by numerous details. It was there plain to see that literacy education in the village investigated had, after several years, only a small influence on exploitation by the moneylenders. Only three per cent of those questioned had noted any improvements in farming, only four percent an increased status for those formerly uneducated; success was seen only in the readiness of the farming households to carry out a simple form of bookkeeping. There it lay, wide open, the gap between the hopes and desires of those learning, aroused and maintained by various sayings and well meant advice, and the marginal influence which literacy education could in reality have on the actual conditions in the village. I don't know how to reduce the gap other than to forego awakening further hope and, on the other hand, destroying desired or undesired illusions. That does not provide any concrete assistance however. None at all even for the farmers in question.

Another Story: The Smart-Alec and the Uneducated Farmer

After participating at an international meeting of puppeteers in France, Ajay, employee of Seva Mandir in Rajasthan, visited us to learn about adult education in the Federal Republic of Germany. During the long evenings he told me further stories.

Once upon a time there was a man who travelled from village to village. By asking difficult questions he tried to prove to the inhabitants that they were idiots. He enticed them with the offer: If you can answer my questions, then I will give you a few rupees. If not, then you will have to pay me.

He came to yet another village. An old man offered him a glass of milk. He knew him from former times. "Can you answer every question?" "Yes, of course!" The old man continued: "I am an uneducated person. I'll bet ten rupees. But if I win, then you have to give me twenty rupees!" "Okay!" said the smart-alec.

And then the old man posed his question: "What creature has two mouths, two tails, four eyes and two ears and is neither a bird nor any other animal, but a living creature?" The sly man thought for a long, long time. He finally gave up: "I have been beaten for the first time!" The poor, old man took the twenty rupees.

"Now, tell me what it is!" The poor, old man immediately gave him ten rupees back. "I have never seen this creature myself and I don't know whether it has ever lived. Since I don't know what it is then you are entitled to receive ten rupees back."

The Second Travel Sketch: The Herdsmen

In 1980 I was on an official trip to various regions of Indonesia. It was here that I made notes on the situation of families working as herdsmen as an additional form of income. They live in Western Timor in a village with 1,100 inhabitants, on a plain amidst rolling country. The inhabitants have come down from the mountains because life there became so difficult during the ever-lengthening drought periods. But even here on the plain the few wells are empty and the river which is full in the rainy season is nothing more than a small trickle. Vegetables do not grow without water, dried rice at least fills the stomach; the village inhabitants scarcely rise above the level of subsistence. At the end of the last drought, hunger gnawed at their weakened strength. Another piece of reality belongs to this situation. More than 50 families in the village have been tending cattle for several years. Rich landowners from the town purchase young cattle for approx 100,000 Rupiahs (about DM450) and give one animal each to a family to raise and feed. Only one at a time so they can properly care for it. For doing this they receive 1,000 Rupiahs a month (DM4.50). After one and a half years the cattle are ready for export and bring the owners 300,000 Rupiahs each; minus the pay for the herdsmen, a big

profit. Everyone is aware of this massive exploitation - the rich, the educated, the government representatives, even the people in the village, the village inhabitants themselves. They can not only calculate, they can also read and write. But that clearly does not help them in spite of the many hopes which they were given about the universal remedy of literacy. They cannot defend themselves against this form of exploitation. If they will not do it for this price, then there are plenty in the neighbouring villages who will.

Results of Research: Literacy and "Life Without the Written Word"

In the mid-seventies I carried out research on adult education in Tanzania, working part of the time as an associate employee of the Institute for Adult Education in Dar es Salaam. My on-the-spot experience there still influences my "understanding of the Third World" today. It was the time of a huge expansion of practical undertakings in basic education in Tanzania which included, amongst other things, the health and education campaigns and the national movement for literacy. Each campaign was able to win millions of followers. Accordingly, the studies on this phase (cf Kassam, Malya and Bhola) are extremely numerous and detailed; I, myself, contributed to the "Tanzanian research boom" with several papers. I still consider the following results from the study "Adult Education and Development in Tanzania" to be very important and the observations made most helpful:

All efforts regarding immediate and successive measures for basic education with a view to lifelong learning are all the more remarkable because in Tanzania they have to be carried out in a situation which, particularly in the rural areas, is generally determined by social communication processes independent of the written word. The traditional forms of communication, production and education were dominant up until a few years ago and still are in several areas. Long term education in schools for a part of the population has not been able to change the situation. Even the out-of-school activities of basic education (although significantly stronger than the schools) have not succeeded in attaining a breakthrough in this respect as they could not be fully integrated into the every day life and work of the village communities. They remained, as a functional form of basic education, an alien event to which one devoted a certain amount of time but which never acquired the reputation of being essential to life. This became apparent, particularly in connection with attempts at literacy education, in two respects. First of all, the newly-acquired ability of being able to read and write had not led to any direct improvement in the socio-economic conditions for the community and for the individual farmer and his family. The conclusion that the functionality and the work-oriented nature of literacy would quickly lead to an increase in, for example, economic growth had proved to be illusory for Tanzania even without the exclusion of medium or long-term possibilities. Further, the investigation had shown that e.g. in improving agricultural gain and in introducing the necessary innovations, a multitude of aspects and methods need to be taken into consideration which go far beyond the problem of literacy. On the other hand interesting development activities have been started up which were not connected with

literacy as being the essential first step. For the majority of the rural population the mastering of productive and social skills as a means of security was not, at first, influenced by the ability to write things down and to read material. Even here it becomes clear that literacy (functional or non-functional), the whole of basic education and adult education in general had to, or still has to, compete against an existing culture and its forms of communication, upbringing and education which scarcely have anything to do with the 'Literacy Environment' propagated in Tanzania. On the other hand they effect much more than the mere availability of reading material although this too is essential.

In Tanzania this far-reaching association of ideas does not appear to have been analysed consistently enough or made use of in solution seeking. This is alluded to in the frequently posed question: What must be done to prevent the 'new' literates from relapsing into illiteracy? This is fundamentally a defensively formulated question which does not place importance on the usefulness of reading and writing for coping with life but rather questions, at a technical level, how skills which have been taught with great effort and which cannot be immediately practised can be maintained. This is then usually answered with the demand for more and better reading material. It would probably be more correct to ask how the newly-acquired skills can be used by adults at a practical level.

More Questions than Answers

In December 1981 I attended an international workshop "Internal and External Colonisation. The History of the Influence of Europe on the Rest of the World" (see Gerwin, Mergner) at the University of Oldenburg. To a certain extent, I was surprised that in the discussions on education and development one thesis initially remained unchallenged: Literacy first, followed (automatically) by development. Education was held to be a general pre-requisite for development; and vice-versa: under-development was caused primarily by illiteracy.

It is not a matter of producing counter-evidence here but I would however like to take a look at some historical situations. I have hardly ever seen a more fascinating farm culture than that of the rice terraces on Bali. These rice terraces are built on a complex system of cultivation and irrigation. It is magnificent to see how the water trickles down centimetre by centimetre from one plateau to the next, gradually covering a large area. The system of political, social and legal responsibility behind all this must surely demand great respect for the duties and rights involved from the people concerned in the area. What I believe to be important here for our discussion is: weren't these rice terraces, which are still being cultivated today, planted centuries or millenia ago by illiterate farmers? Weren't, or respectively, aren't, these farmers highly qualified in their sphere of work, although they are today often described, in the jargon of development experts, as uneducated, ignorant illiterates? This view appears even more absurd when one takes a look at another part of Indonesian reality: the huge city

of Jakarta with its vast problems of slums, unemployment and traffic chaos is the (planned) work of highly qualified Indonesian experts and also, of course, of numerous advisers from industrialised nations. I do not wish to shut my eyes to the magnitude of the problems and the true efforts on the part of the Indonesian population and bureaucracy to change the situation. At this point I only want to contrast this in a caricative manner with the oft advocated determinant: Education results in true development! and thereby draw attention to the reverse side of the coin: Doesn't education also result in underdevelopment?, which perhaps no fewer people had to or have to endure. One should always question, in this connection, the qualitative nature of education and development. Shouldn't one also refer to the fact that many development processes took place in the past without literacy education and other formal western educational forms and can probably also continue to do so in the future? This refers not only to changing types of development but also, in particular, to traditional ways of life which do not acquiesce to the forces of growth and change.

Another situation which should naturally be examined more closely is the comparison which is often drawn between north and south: a high standard of education in the north has made the present development there possible; its absence in the south has caused underdevelopment. Historically seen however shouldn't one work from the fact that the greater majority of people were illiterate at the beginning of the industrial development in Europe? The only exceptions here were Adel, Klerus and a few other social groups (cf Cipolla). The majority of farmers, however, including probably the tradesmen and thus the first workers, were definitely illiterate. And things did not progress in such a manner that precedence was given to compulsory education and literacy before development in agriculture, the trades and industry had been introduced and carried out. Shouldn't we recognise the face, that apart from a small group of important scientists and highly qualified engineers, that the majority of the representatives of development were and also remained illiterate? Doesn't it set one thinking when one takes a look at the many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America today where there is an even larger group of scientists, intellectuals and bureaucrats who have a very high standard of education, particularly when compared to the above-mentioned historical example. Doesn't it become too complicated, in this connection, to refer to the fact that the educated in the developing countries are rich whilst the uneducated remain poor, and at the same time pretend that they remain poor because they are uneducated?

Third Travel Sketch: Who is an Ignorant Person?

In the spring of 1983 I was in Tanzania for consultations on various projects. It was there, during a conference on further education for adult educators, that my colleague Mutangira told the following story:

The young dynamic Director of Regional Development in Ruffiji spoke, during a visit to one of the villages, to a group of elderly inhabitants. His speech on questions of development

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ended in the critical formulation: "You are illiterate and ignorant, you must learn to read and write. Then things will improve for you!" Many of the old men frowned. One of them took a piece of paper and wrote down a few sentences in Arabic he knew from the Koran. He then gave the piece of paper to the director with the plea to read it out aloud. The director looked at the piece of paper, frowned, but could not decipher anything. "What does this scribble mean?" he questioned and handed back the piece of paper. The old man took it and gave it to another who was sitting a few seats away. The latter took it and read the message out loud without hesitating once. Then the old man said: "We are not illiterate but perhaps you are if you cannot read this and reproach us because of it!"

Who is actually literate and who isn't, in what language, in what or for what society, group and culture, what assists whom under what conditions?

Outlook

After having read this you can probably imagine what I think of programmes which extoll the "eradication of illiteracy" and "educating the ignorant" in "crash course" methods. This was, by the way, a translation of specialist terms: eradication, liquidation, ignorance, crash programmes etc.

Ultimately it is about man, his qualifications and their applicability. It is also about cultures where written communication is still relatively unimportant and unnecessary and about social systems which produce, as a rule, underqualified and overqualified people. Neither condemning the individual nor discriminating social groups are going to be true aids in the search for facts and solutions. Literacy - yes - but well removed from the many false ideas and exaggerated expectations. At least, only then when it is wanted, agreed upon and shared by all those concerned and when it is culturally and socially meaningful.

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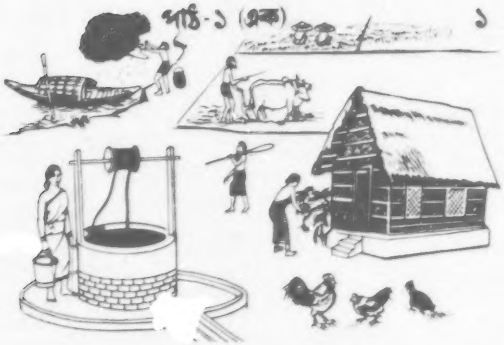

WHERE the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Rabindranath Tagore

from GITANJALI

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